

Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series
Harper Dolvin interview
Conducted by James Newberry
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Transcribed by Jack Johnston

Harper Lane Dolvin was born in Atlanta in 1923. Drafted into the military during his first semester at the University of Georgia, Dolvin trained as an aircraft mechanic and gunner in the Army Air Corps. Stationed in England from 1942 to 1946, Dolvin flew 13 bombing missions over Germany as a replacement for soldiers who were injured. He recorded his oral history interview at Kennesaw State University in March 2017.

Full Transcript

Interviewer: Okay, this is James Newberry, and I am here with Harper Dolvin on Tuesday March 21, 2017, at the Sturgess Library at Kennesaw State University, and Mr. Dolvin, do you agree to this interview?

Dolvin: I sure do.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you so much. I appreciate you sitting down with me. So, what is your full name?

Dolvin: Harper Lane Dolvin.

Interviewer: And what's your birthdate?

Dolvin: Twelve, three, twenty-three.

Interviewer: Okay and where were you born Mr. Dolvin?

Dolvin: Atlanta, Georgia.

Interviewer: So, tell me about Atlanta in your childhood.

Dolvin: Well, it was a city of 240,000 people which was very small. I went to grammar school at Tenth Street Grammar School. I went to Oakley Men's School. I went to Boys High School for senior and graduated from Boys High School sometime about 19...

[Dolvin thinks]

Dolvin: ...44 or 45. And uh, I lived about 20 blocks from the school but I had an automobile, which was a rarity in that time, and I drove it to school every day. I was the banker for the school. I went to the bank every day. I worked in the cafeteria. I was on the...

[Dolvin pauses]

Dolvin: ...well, I wasn't on the football team but I worked for the football team. I was on the fencing team. I was on the boxing team, and uh, had a job as the manager advertiser for the newspaper. All of these things gave me a great deal of experience that I've used all of my life. So it was a great time to grow up, and Atlanta was a great city at that time.

Interviewer: And why did you have all of those jobs?

Dolvin: Beg your pardon?

Interviewer: Why did you have all those jobs?

Dolvin: I just liked to do em, stayed busy.

[Dolvin chuckles]

Interviewer: And how is it possible for you to have a car at that time?

Dolvin: Well, my father was a used car dealer, and I had fooled with cars all of my life. When I was sixteen, which you could drive at sixteen, so I had bought a car. I also had a business. I ran a cracker machine that you found in your department stores and service entrances to a lot of office buildings. It had crackers and things in it, and they were National Biscuit Company crackers. And I had twenty of those machines all over Atlanta. I serviced them twice a week. Which gave me some extra income. Which I needed it. But it was great to grow up in Atlanta. I always appreciated it. I graduated from Boys High School. I had a scholarship to the University of Georgia. I went down and spent about two weeks there, and Uncle Sam had already enlisted my half for World War II. So, I went into the service in 1942, real early. I stayed in for four years.

Interviewer: I want to step back for just a second and ask you, “What were your parents’ names?”.

Dolvin: Lane Dolvin and Lila Dolvin.

Interviewer: And you said your father was in the used car business...

Dolvin: That’s correct.

Interviewer: Did your mother work outside of the home?

Dolvin: No, never.

[Dolvin laughs]

Interviewer: And did you have any siblings?

Dolvin: No.

Interviewer: So, can you describe your childhood home?

Dolvin: We lived on Macklin Avenue, which was right off of Halon Avenue, between [undecipherable 4:51] Boulevard. I had a very happy childhood. We lived in a house my father bought for \$4,500. When he sold it, it was about \$250,000 so the prices in Atlanta had gone up that much in that short of time. My whole existence was either in the neighborhood or in the school. It was about six miles in between Boys High and Girls High, and I made that trip a couple times a week.

[Dolvin laughs]

Interviewer: Why did you make that trip?

Dolvin: To pick up my girlfriend!

[Dolvin and Interviewer laugh]

Dolvin: But those were good times. I was drafted into the service, as most people were in that time. I went to Keesler Field, Mississippi for basic training. I went to Amarillo, Texas, where I learned aircraft mechanics. By the way, the reason I got into the Air Corps is when I went to Fort McPherson to be inducted. One of the people there who was in the viewing of sending people to their prospective places was a good friend of mine's father. So he asked me what branch of the service I would like to be in, and I told him the Air Corps. So, he just wrote "Air Corps", and that was the beginning. I stayed in the Air Corps the entire time.

Interviewer: Why did you want to go into the Air Corps?

Dolvin: It was cleaner. It had more chance for advancement. It was a more exciting job. So, it wasn't much of a choice for me. I didn't want to be in the Navy. That

would've been my second choice, but I certainly didn't want to go there. The infantry didn't offer anything for me, so this was a logical conclusion just to go to the Air Force.

Interviewer: What do you mean by cleaner?

Dolvin: Well, you came home to sleep at night. You didn't sleep out under a tent. You didn't trudge in the mud. You went off on your mission, flew back home, and had a place to sleep, a nice barracks. So, it was just a whole different type of program.

Interviewer: So, I want to talk about the years before Pearl Harbor. Did you have any sense that the United States would be going into that war? Did you expect to serve?

Dolvin: I was in Sunday school on a Sunday morning when the war was declared. It was almost a sure thing we'd be going into the service. I was in a class of boys, probably about forty people. At least twenty of them died in the service. It was uh...it was a good and bad time because we didn't know what to expect. The ones of us that have survived have done very well I think.

Interviewer: How did you get word that you were drafted?

Dolvin: It came in the mail. "Your friends and neighbors have selected you to be in the Armed Services. Report to Fort McPherson."

[Dolvin chuckles]

Interviewer: And how did you feel about that?

Dolvin: That was fine. We expected to go. Wasn't any question about that. If you were in good health and had the right mind, you were expected to go into the service.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about Fort McPherson, that was boot camp?

Dolvin: No, that was just the induction center.

Interviewer: I see, and then you transferred from there to boot camp?

Dolvin: Yes, Keesler Field, Mississippi.

Interviewer: Can you describe training at bootcamp?

Dolvin: Oh boy.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: Well, first we got there, and they had not prepared for our coming. We stood out in the rain right after breakfast which was done in a tent with the mess hall contraptions we ate out of. We stood in the rain all day long, and finally about four o' clock in the afternoon, they said "We have a place cleared off for you." They give you a tent. It took about four people to carry this tent, but six people slept in it. We got out to the place they had cleared off, and there was one spot up next to a paved road I chose for my tent. We set up the tent there. We had little cots that we put in the tent. We tied all of our clothes up on the tent pole in the middle. We were so tired we fell asleep right away. Sometimes about four o' clock in the morning, we were awakened. All of the tents below me were below water. So, we were the only dry tent in the whole place. We had about half of our 1,500 men. We had half go to the hospital in the first day or two. So that left half of the amount that was supposed to be serving. We had our basic training with only about half of the crew. I came out a PFC which is the lowest rank you could get. It was exciting because I didn't have any trouble.

Interviewer: What sort of routines did they put you through?

Dolvin: Well, first we had calisthenics every day. They last about an hour/hour and a half. Then we would have a running time. We started off running, and I was the last one in the pack, I think. They ran about 400 to 500 yards and I wasn't quite up to that. But within two weeks I was running at the front of the line rather than at the back of the line. We ran six miles a day every day. That was just part of your training and getting you in shape. You had no time off at all. You could not leave the base at any time. We hadn't been paid so we didn't have any money either.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: You just stayed in the barracks and wrote letters and told the people at home you were doing great. It was an exciting time. It lasted about three months. From there, I left and went to Amarillo, Texas, which was a school to teach aircraft repair. I enjoyed that very much because I had worked on automobiles all my life. They had the same kind of tools and same opportunities to work on. That school lasted about four months. For those who passed they came out as a Buck Sergeant, which is a three striper. So, I was one of the few who made it out in time. It was good training.

Interviewer: Did you have a choice about going to this mechanics school?

Dolvin: Yes, they gave you an aptitude test. I scored real high on it, so they recommended I go, and I already decided to anyhow. I enjoyed the school, and I enjoyed working there. The only trouble was that you served three times a day. They had eight hours, starting at eight o' clock in the morning, they had one that started in the early afternoon, and they had one that started at night. While you were there you went through the school all three of those times. It went from cold weather down to one hundred and ten degrees. It was awfully hot, but I could stand up in front of the bench where we were working on something and go to sleep almost.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: It was trying times but good times.

Interviewer: What did you have to learn there to complete your training?

Dolvin: Well, you had to learn how to assemble and disassemble engines of airplanes. They had a Wright cyclone engine twelve hundred horsepower. Not only did you learn to assemble it, you could probably do it in the dark after you did it about ten times. It was a twelve-cylinder engine. There were spark plugs on either side of the engine. It had a little thing under the wing that pulled more air through it that gave it more horsepower. So actually, instead of twelve-hundred you'd come up to thirteen-hundred horsepower. When I got to flying, I flew B-24s and B-17s and they all had four of these engines in them. So I was well acquainted with them.

Interviewer: So, you said you were in the air four months?

Dolvin: Something like that, yes.

Interviewer: Where did you go from there?

Dolvin: Las Vegas, Nevada. That was aircraft gunnery school. It lasted about, oh, probably at least four months maybe five. There you learned how to...everything about the aircraft sitting on the ground. You learned how to shoot machine guns. You learned how to pack parachutes. You learned how you're supposed to jump out of a plane with a parachute. You learned to shoot at targets who were...

Interviewer: Just one second.

[Fade out to black]

[Fade back in]

Interviewer: Okay we may stop again to bring him back in, but you were talking about Las Vegas. You were saying the school there was to train you on packing parachutes, manning the guns, that sort of thing.

Dolvin: Airplane recognition. Which is, you could, they had a little machine that would flash a picture of the aircraft on a screen, and you're supposed to identify it. They started off at about half a second, then down to about two tenths of a second, and you're supposed to recognize every one of these airplanes, foreign and domestic. The enemy planes were what you were more interested in. That was interesting. The last week of gunnery school, they had a plane that towed a target. It flew level with the plane that you were in, and you shot the machine guns at the target. They had bullets that had different colors on them. If one of your bullets or a lot of them hit the target, they could tell who shot it when they got back to the base. So, this lasted for a week. It was out of Las Vegas, out at Union Springs, which was an airbase within itself about thirty miles out of Las Vegas. It's still there, by the way. It was an exciting time because you were actually participating in something. You also learned to shoot on the skeet range. You had stations all around it, and you had two houses where the little clay pigeons would come out and you would shoot at them with a rifle. They also had where you could ride in the back of a truck and sit down so that your arms were free. As you rolled down somewhere, they had these birds come out and you would try and shoot them, when they came out. You never knew where they were coming from. So, that was exciting. The weeks there were great.

[Dolvin laughs]

Interviewer: So, in all of these times, though, you were not in a plane, you were still on the ground?

Dolvin: Except for the last week. The last week in school you were flying every day.

Interviewer: Okay and it was to... to train you to fill any position on a plane?

Dolvin: All of them.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: You learned to be the top turret operator, the bottom turret operator, the tail gunner, the two side gunners, and one of them in the nose. You had to learn every position. You had to learn how to transfer fuel on the plane. You uh...

[Dolvin contemplates]

Dolvin: ...you had to learn not to hit your own plane sometimes.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: That last week was the most important. I probably enjoyed that more than any other part of gunnery training.

Interviewer: Did you go on to Ft. Myers, Florida?

Dolvin: I went to Ft. Myers. That was advanced training. Some of the same type of training, but it was a little more advanced, a little deeper. Then I went to Laredo, Texas for the same type of training. And that was even more advanced. And then, I went back to Las Vegas as an instructor. So, I had finished all of the courses and went back to Las Vegas as an instructor at that time because I knew about ninety-five percent more than the other instructors out there.

Interviewer: Did you have any expectation that you would go overseas at some point?

Dolvin: Oh, yeah. Well, we were preordained to go overseas as soon as we had enough training. Before going, we went to Greensboro, North Carolina, which is a base to tell you survival tactics. They had a big tower out in the middle of a lake, and you had to jump off of the tower with your clothes on, take off your clothes, fill them up with air, and float for half an hour at least, which was great training in case you were... your boat was sunk or something. You could stay afloat for a period of time. You could stay afloat forever if you keep your clothes wet so that the air would stay in it. But that was exciting. We also had, you had to learn to crawl on the ground because they had guns shooting up above your head. That was additional training. You had to learn all of the smaller guns that they had. Most of them were automatic rifles. You had to learn how to load them. You had to learn how to take them apart, put them back together in the dark, not ever looking at

them. They had a little thing that would tell you how much space you had to use between where the barrel was and the hammer behind it. If it was too little, the gun would hang up. If it was too loose, you were liable to get some spray back from the bullet that it shot. I carried one of those things for twenty years after I got out of the service.

[Dolvin chuckles]

Dolvin: Just a reminder, you know.

Interviewer: So, when did you ship out?

Dolvin: Ohhh....

Interviewer: It doesn't have to be an exact date, more like around what time.

Dolvin: Yes, it was, uh, real early '42.

Interviewer: And where did you ship out from?

Dolvin: Well, I have to tell you about that. I shipped out from New York. I went on the Queen Mary across the ocean. Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, and their party had a whole floor on this plane.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Dolvin: The boat was divided into half. If you lived on the front half, you couldn't go to the back half, and the back half couldn't go to the front. So, everyday about three hours a day, I would go out and climb the netting at the front of the ship. I would just sit there and watch. They had patrol boats that patrolled it on the front of the Queen Mary just to be sure there would be no submarine attacks. Of course, it would go faster than the ship, so they gradually lost ground until they were so far

behind you couldn't see them anymore. But I would sit there every day. Nobody ever said one thing about "Why are you out here?", you know. It was exciting just sitting there watching them. I got over to Scotland. We landed in Scotland. We getting ready to get off of the plane and get on the boat that would take you to the shore. Winston Churchill came in, and I happened to be the first one to see him. So, I called attention, and we had about seventy-five people in this little group getting ready to go out, and he made a short speech. He was closer to me than you are, and that was exciting because he actually saved Great Britain, no doubt about it. He put every man, woman, and child to work over there, and was very successful in doing so. He gave us his old victory sign.

[Dolvin flashes the famous "V" Sign from Churchill]

Dolvin: That's something I'll never forget because he was a great man. In fact, years later I went to the cemetery where he was buried. He didn't want to be buried in West Minister Abbey where most important people are buried. He was buried in this little country cemetery. So, that was a neat experience.

Interviewer: It was safe to travel on that ship with the prime minister on board?

Dolvin: That's correct.

Interviewer: So, you said you landed in Scotland?

Dolvin: I landed in Scotland. Everybody got off the plane, and everybody had a certain place to put their luggage. They were going to the same place. I got the assignment of watching the luggage. That was my job after I got on land there. They had tenders that would take us over to the shore. There was a pile of luggage, and everyone had at least two different kinds of bags, just a duffle bag that you'd stuff something in and something that looked like a suitcase was the other one. They had big stacks of these things out there, and one by one they would come and haul those off until there were two little bags left on the dock and that was mine.

[Dolvin and interviewer chuckle]

Dolvin: That took a full day to do that. They had given us railroad tickets. They picked me up in the truck and my two little bags, and we rolled to the railway station. I got on a plane and had to transfer one time to get to the base I was going to. It was in a little town called Tibenham. Which is south of Norwich about forty-five, fifty miles, out in the middle of nowhere. They had a train station and a pub, and that was the town, nothing else. So, I got there, and I went out to the base. Wasn't nobody there to pick me up, wasn't no way to call the base, so I drug these two bags till I got to the camp. They didn't even know I was coming to tell you the truth.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: The CO looked at my recommendation and said, "I see you're an aircraft mechanic." I said, "Yessir, I was." He says, "We lost four planes last night. We have about four more that are damaged, and I'm gonna give you one of them and all the help you need, but we need to get it flying in about four days." So, we were off on operations. I went out and picked out a plane. It had more holes in it than a civ did. This flack had gone through it, and I said, "How in the world am I gonna stop all of these holes?" Then my used car business came in. I mixed up the same type of stuff you would use to fix a car. They had a dent place in it, and I stopped up all the holes on this plane. That was really good, except the first flight you went on about a third of them would pop out!

[Dolvin and Interviewer laugh]

Dolvin: We had to learn a little bit better than that. We had some that you could cut a piece of metal off of the plane, put a screw in the middle, and it expanded and tightened up on that screw and the piece of metal would hold flat. But you couldn't glue any metal on it. It would fly off the first time it got cold, then, when it got warm, it would get loose and come off. It took about four days to get the plane so it might ever fly. I had experience later when I got ready to leave England, they assigned me to fly home on that thing.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: We changed the name of it. It was something like “The Sweetest Rose of Texas”, but we changed it to “Patches”, which was a very appropriate name for it. It had a hundred and four holes in it.

Interviewer: So, you flew home on the same plane you were initially repairing?

Dolvin: Yes, that’s correct. Didn’t get home on it, though.

Interviewer: Didn’t quite make it?

[Dolvin chuckles]

Dolvin: I’ll tell you about that later.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you said you were in Tibenham?

Dolvin: Yep.

Interviewer: What were your living conditions there?

Dolvin: As I said they weren’t expecting me when I first moved in. They put me in a barracks with a bunch of bakers and cooks. I thought that was terrible, but it turned out to be one of the best things to ever happen to me. I stayed in that barracks for a good about six to eight weeks. A lot of the cooks and bakers really could not read and write. I read their letters to them, and I wrote their letters for them. So, anytime I needed something in the mess hall, I would just walk in, open arms, and they were ready to give me anything I needed, you know. That was a great thing that happened. The mess hall and the barracks that people lived in was part of the camp. It was about a mile almost to the flight line. I moved up to this flight line inside of a hangar that had all of the gunnery material in it that we taught. Of course, when we got overseas, some of them still didn’t know enough

to take a flight. I flew the first flight with every new crew that came in as long as I was over there.

Interviewer: How did they designate you to do that?

Dolvin: Well, in the gunnery school I was the only one who had done any flying at all. The rest of them, all of their training had been on the ground, but mine had been in the air a lot of times. I was an automatic person to do these things. I got to know every new crew, every new officer for the whole time I was there. In fact, when I moved up to the hangar, the CQ, in charge of quarters, I would be the first one he'd wake up every morning. I went to the briefing every morning, learned where they were going and how they were gonna get there, and the time expected to make the trip. So, I was one of the most informed people on the air base, just because of the position I was in.

Interviewer: Did you ever go off of the base, into a town or?

[Dolvin shakes his head side to side]

Dolvin: No.

[Dolvin chuckles]

Dolvin: There weren't any towns close by. That pub outside, wouldn't any use going there. I never did leave the base as long as I was there.

Interviewer: What was the distance to London?

Dolvin: To another town?

Interviewer: To Norwich or to London, a bigger town, a town of size.

Dolvin: Norwich was a big town. As I said it was about thirty-five/forty miles. London was about eighty to ninety miles south. You couldn't get any time off anyhow. You know, you were flying or doing something every day. We set up skeet ranges there. We did training for the crews. This kept them occupied more than anything else, but they got better as time went on.

Interviewer: And how frequently were new soldiers coming there?

Dolvin: As soon as we needed a new crew. They were required to fly twenty-five missions, and then they could go be transferred back if they wanted to. Some of them stayed longer than that. I was in a position that if one person in the crew had something wrong, appendicitis, tonsillitis, something where they couldn't fly, I would fly in their place for that one mission. A funny thing happened. When you got back from a flight, they had a debriefing. They would ask you questions and you would answer them about what you saw and did on the flight, because I was taking off my fur line boot, I noticed there was blood dripping out of it, and there was a piece of flack in it. "Well," they said, "you're gonna get a Purple Heart. The only trouble is you're not here; you were flying for somebody else today." So, about ten days later I saw somebody get a Purple Heart that I was supposed to get.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: So, that was exciting, too, but nobody cared about it, you know? It was just a joke almost.

[Dolvin continues laughing]

Interviewer: So, how many missions did you fly?

Dolvin: Officially thirteen or fourteen. Unofficially about thirty, probably.

Interviewer: And what were you doing on these missions? Where were you flying?

Dolvin: Well, I started out... the CO would have to fly out to get his flight time in, and I would fly with him. When I did that I flew as an engineer, which stands between the pilot and the co-pilot on takeoff. But in any regular mission I could shoot any gun on the ship. I went along just to watch the others do it more than anything else. In fact, by the time the war was over coming down to nothing, they changed my MOS from a gunnery instructor to a flight instructor. 938 was the number given to a flight observer. And then we started taking pictures through a camera that was in the bottom of the plane showing where the bombs had dropped. You could see where they hit and how much damage they did. So, every mission you went on, you got back, you tell them what you saw, what you did, what planes went down in your group. If you hit an enemy plane, which if an enemy plane was shot down you got nine people claimed they hit it.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: That was always exciting.

Interviewer: And what were your targets?

Dolvin: Oh... Cologne, Dusseldorf, Berlin, Scandinavian countries, whatever needed to be hit that day.

Interviewer: Was it rail lines or factories?

Dolvin: Most of the time we were trying to keep them from moving stuff from the factory to somewhere else. So, there would be marshalling yards where trains were filling up with supplies to take somewhere. That was our target. We went back to some target five or six or seven times or days in a row, and the reason for that is that we didn't get it all cleared out and they'd come in and build it back in one day and start moving stuff again. So, we'd bomb it again, and this would just keep them from moving stuff from one place to another. And also, the flack. They were shooting anti-aircraft guns at us. We could report where we saw anti-aircraft fly, and then we could bomb that place, which we did a lot of times.

Interviewer: You said you had gotten a piece of flack in your boot.

Dolvin: Yea.

Interviewer: How often did you face the anti-aircraft fire, and did you ever encounter enemy planes?

Dolvin: Well, we had one plane coming back from a mission. We had one outdoor motor that was still running and one indoor. They won't fly very good like that. So, the pilot said, "Keep watch, we outta know when we're above the English Channel." We were coming back. So, as soon as we got over the English Channel I saw sticking through the clouds a church steeple. I told him we were already too low, so they pushed the engines up as fast as they would go, and he said, "We're gonna lose altitude anyhow. So, if it goes down it goes out over the Channel again." As he looked over to the bank I was up in the front there, I could see it, too, there was one of these amphibious bases where they would keep the amphibious craft in hangar. They'd come out and roll them in the water, and they could take off. They had the skis on the bottom of the plane so they could take off. He turns this plane, this big B-24, and hits the runway there. The trouble is, the runway there don't last but about a hundred and fifty yards, and then we went out in the woods with the rest of the plane.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: That was the only plane that I didn't get back on, but all the rest of the flights were pretty well routine.

Interviewer: And that was a B-24?

Dolvin: B-24.

Interviewer: What all types of planes did you fly?

Dolvin: Well, my earliest training was on B-17s. The B-24s were the only ones I flew during my service time.

Interviewer: Were you stationed in England during your entire service time in Europe?

Dolvin: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. If you could give me just sort of a typical day from when you'd be flying on one of these missions to when you got up. What you were gonna do, how were you anticipating it, what did you have for breakfast, that sort of thing.

Dolvin: Well, as I said the CQ, who was a person that woke everybody up that was gonna fly, he would come in and he would wake up these people because he knew exactly where they slept. The rest of the barracks didn't even have to know anything was going on. They'd get up, dress, and go to the mess hall. I would be one, too. They'd wake me up early, and I'd go to the mess hall and come back up and they had a briefing. They would tell you where you were going, what your target was, what you were expected to accomplish, how long it would take, how much ground fire you would have, if you had any fighter planes that might be up to chase you. They would give you all of the particulars that they had, so you knew where you were going. This would be before daylight. Then we would go, if you were a gunner, you would get your gun, which had been taken out of the plane the night before. All of the bullets were taken out, they were put in a case about like this.

[Dolvin makes a gesture with his hands to illustrate the size of the case]

Dolvin: You'd go out to the plane, you'd place the gun on this mount, you would put it together and make sure it was together correctly, you would insert your cartridges, make sure everything was working correctly. Then you stayed there until your briefing was over with and everybody else was ready to go. Then there'd be planes taking off. Each group had about twenty-four planes that flew in a

formation. There'd be ten groups in airfields close by. So, that would be two hundred and fifty planes in the air at one time. They'd have to get up and get in formation. Then you could start across the English Channel and go to your target. A lot of new crews, and this's the reason I flew with new crews a lot of the time, you'd get up in the air and the suction of the air would syphon the gas out of the top of the tank. It would catch on fire because the engine was right up in front of it. So, it would catch on fire and burn. The pilot would wanna turn around and go back because he said "Hey! We can't fly like this!". Don't worry, it'll go out in about five minutes. They didn't believe you, but they'd sit there and watch it. About five minutes later, no fire. Every new crew had to go through that experience, and that was exciting. When you were on a mission, if a plane got shot down, you'd tell them what plane it was, where it was shot down, did you see any parachutes come out, if you did, how many? This was the debriefing you got at the end of every mission. It kept people informed on what was going on. A lot of times they had people on the ground who could see some of these people if they bailed out. Otherwise, they'd be captured and put into prison. They had undercover people who would bring them back to shore. I never did see any of them come back to our base, but there were plenty of them that were saved that way.

Interviewer: Were you ever fearful?

Dolvin: Scared?

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: Maybe once or twice a little bit. You'd know what these planes could take and what they couldn't. If one of them was doing more than what they were supposed to, they became a little fearful of that. Just like I was talking about landing and going over the Channel on a little short runway, that was fearful, you know. You didn't know if you were going to make it or not. You didn't know how many trees were in the back of it, but it was better than trying to land in the water. These planes don't float. If you landed in the English Channel, that ship would sink in a hurry. So, your chances of getting out were very poor.

Interviewer: What did it sound like on board?

Dolvin: Noisy. You wore earphones, you wore an oxygen mask that went around your face, you could tell everybody who flew every day by the markings on their face where there were blisters. They gave you some K-rations or something to eat, which was better than nothing but not a whole lot better. It was part of the routine, you got used to it and it didn't bother you anymore.

Interviewer: Were there people, I know most of the people were new crews, but were there people who you grew friends with or were working with for a long time ever?

Dolvin: Well, the crews lived in a place by themselves. Everybody else lived somewhere else. I was more friendly with the cooks and the bakers and my little group in the gunnery school, the ground gunnery school, and there was nobody else there. But I knew everybody because I saw them at briefings every day. I saw them when we ate breakfast, I saw them when we ate dinner, so I knew most everybody there. It was rare to find somebody I didn't know, you know. Every new crew had to go through gunnery school before they went on their first mission. They usually had to go back through school after they got back from their first mission because we found out what they didn't know. We could teach them again how to do something that they were doing wrong. So, that was an exciting time.

Interviewer: And how did you keep up with news of the war?

Dolvin: The British Broadcasting System was operating all of the time. We had a scrawny little radio that we kept in our barracks...uh hangar. We could listen to that. By about this time they had a lot of buzz bombs coming loose. The Germans had perfected these bombs that would run for a certain distance, and when it ran out of gas it would crash. If it happened to be somewhere important, they would crash and do some damage. But, most of them fell where it didn't make a bit of difference.

[Dolvin chuckles]

Dolvin: But it was easy to keep up, and in your briefing, you got briefings on what was going on, which happened every morning before a flight.

Interviewer: I know you saw Churchill; did you see any other sort of famous people at that point?

Dolvin: Yes, Anthony Eden was there. Churchill just outshined so many people. You could pick him out of a crowd. He actually saved Great Britain, there's no question about that. His famous speech "We'll fight on the land, on the sea, but we won't give up" ...

Interviewer: Very inspiring?

Dolvin: Yes, very much so. I was... went into a theater on the trip I made into London. And in this theater whenever Churchill came on, a lot of people booed him. I couldn't understand that. I found out that he had sent women into the service. They were for the [indecipherable 53:49]. They did the cooking and the serving in the cafeterias and things. They did the bookwork. They did the laundry work. They did anything, and the men did all of the fighting. On the trip I made to London I was actually going up to the northern part of England, up to Blackpool. I got to fly on a mission up there in a Lancaster, which they flew at night. That was the first time that I found out that the Lancaster wasn't made out of metal, the wings were made out of stuff that they made planes out of many years ago. Just a real thick tarpaulin type thing that was varnished so many times. That thing would go out there and go down the run way and look like a bird.

[Dolvin flaps his wings like a bird]

Dolvin: It would jump up in the air and fly, but it would carry twice the bomb load that the American planes would carry. They bombed at night, and they bombed specific targets, but they didn't have any way of knowing whether they hit them or not. So, a lot of the bombs didn't hit anything. That was an exciting time.

Interviewer: Did you have contact with your family and friends back in the United States?

Dolvin: Just by mail. We got free mail during that time, and kept up a pretty good correspondence back and forth. Of course, the letter might be two weeks old by the time you got it, but that was better than not getting it at all. You didn't have time too much to worry about things, you stayed busy all of the time.

Interviewer: So, let's talk about when you got word that you were going home.

Dolvin: Okay. Well, in the first place, we were planning on going to the Pacific. They wanted everything packed up and ready to go in a big hurry. So, the group got busy doing all of these things and putting everything together. As a plane would get loaded so to speak, they would put so many crews on there and take off. They would take off and fly to Edenborough, Scotland, just to see if the plane was going to fly like it's supposed to. Well, when they got down to the last two planes, all of our pilots and co-pilots were gone. So, we got another pilot and a co-pilot from another group and they came over. I walked out; I was supposed to be one of the last ones to leave. I crawled up in the plane, and I looked at them, I didn't know either one of them, went back in the back and walked back to the front and I said, "Captain, this thing is not going to fly." He said, "What do you mean it's not going to fly?" I said, "It's not loaded right, it's not going to fly." He says, "Did you have to do anything with loading this plane?" I said, "No sir." He says, "well, I suggest you get back there and sit down and we'll worry about that." I said, "Yessir, but it ain't gonna fly." And I walked on back. He says to the co-pilot, "Get that smartass sergeant's name, I'll put him on the report when we get to [indecipherable 58:11]. So, I went back and sat down. We cranked up, got on the runway, and started off a B-24 has the wheels here...

[Dolvin makes a motion with his hands to illustrate the structure of the B-24]

Dolvin: ... nose wheel up in front. This thing starts to take off, and the ass-end goes down and drags on the runway for about a hundred yards, sparks just flying everywhere. Just making all sorts of racket. The co-pilot comes back and says, "The captain wants to see you." I go up front and he says, "Can you make this plane fly?" I said, "Yessir." I reached over and pushed the full throttles all the way forward, and he says, "You're gonna burn up an engine!" I said, "And you're gonna fall out of the sky!" So, I went back and got everybody's duffle bag and put it in the bomb bay, sent people up to the nose, sent people to the radio room, sent people up to the bulwark where the bomb load is. I got everybody off the back, and I says, "It'll

fly now.” Well, we flew to Iceland. I knew when that thing hit Iceland I wouldn’t gonna fly anymore.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: They grounded it when it got there. So, as soon as I got to Iceland, I caught up with another plane and I said, “You got room for one more passenger?” They said, “Sure.” So, I exchanged planes. That was Patches. That was the plane I had started with when I first got there.

Interviewer: This was, what, three or four years later by that time?

Dolvin: Yea, right. Our group had over two hundred missions. I was there for the hundredth mission that they flew. They had something that they put on your... one of you air medals or something... a star or something, I don’t know what it was. I was there for the two-hundredth mission. I think they finally wound up with about two-hundred and eighteen missions, which was one of the longest ones of any group over there.

Interviewer: And you were part of the Eighth Air Force?

Dolvin: Yes, four forty-fifth bomb group.

Interviewer: I want to backtrack just for a second, do you have memories of VE Day?

Dolvin: Was I what?

Interviewer: Do you have memories of VE Day?

Dolvin: Yea, I was on the way over there. Oh, you mean the Victory Day?

Interviewer: Yessir.

Dolvin: Oh, yes. I have a lot of them.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: We were all set for a mission that day, and it was scrubbed, of course. There were a lot of places in Europe that didn't know that VE Day had taken place. Honestly, there was probably a lot of people killed on that day before the message got to everybody. But I remember it well.

Interviewer: When you... you said you flew to Iceland.

Dolvin: Yes.

Interviewer: And then you flew back to the United States?

Dolvin: Yes, on a different plane.

Interviewer: And where did you land there?

Dolvin: In Iceland?

Interviewer: No, back in the United States.

Dolvin: Boston. We went to Iceland a few years ago, and the only town in Iceland really is Reykjavík. The airbase was up on the plateau. The ocean was way down here.

[Dolvin drops a hand to floor to signify the location of the ocean]

Dolvin: When you got off the plane, they had a coat you had to put on. You had only about this much vision.

[Dolvin makes a small square with his hands]

Dolvin: It was thirty degrees below zero, and that's what it was at thirty-thousand feet was thirty below zero. You didn't want to breathe that air, it could hurt your lungs.

Interviewer: Well, back in the United States, how much longer were you in the service?

Dolvin: Seven, eight months.

Interviewer: And where did you spend that time?

Dolvin: Charleston, South Carolina.

Interviewer: Doing what?

Dolvin: They assigned me to an air cargo base. They put me in a place that gave tools to new mechanics that were coming in. I was a tech sergeant then, and I lived off of the base. I would just drive in every morning, go to the mess hall, eat breakfast, go up to the places where people were going to get tools, then I'd get in my car and go back home.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: I did nothing for the last month, at least.

Interviewer: When were you discharged?

Dolvin: Forty-six, probably early February.

Interviewer: How did it feel to be out of the military after all that time?

Dolvin: I was ready.

[Dolvin chuckles]

Interviewer: What were your plans?

Dolvin: I was going into the used car business.

Interviewer: So, tell me about getting into the business that your father was in.

Dolvin: Well, I had bought and sold cars before I went in. In fact, when I went into the military, I had three or four cars and each sold for me. I even bought a house trailer down in South Carolina and towed it back to Atlanta to make an office. I was determined to be in the used car business, but I was also determined to be in the used car business with my daddy. I wouldn't want to ride his coattail in. I went into the used car business and I stayed there for forty-four years.

Interviewer: And where was your business in Atlanta?

Dolvin: I was at 28 Alexander St, which is right behind the medical arts building. Then I bought a piece of property on Bankhead Avenue, a block from Marietta St. I bought this property, and over time I bought the whole block it was on.

Interviewer: So, you found success in this business, clearly.

Dolvin: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, and could you tell me about your family?

Dolvin: I had one boy and one girl. The girl is the oldest. They still live in the area. I'm close to my daughter, not quite as close to my son. He has one son who is graduating from high school this year, so he's almost grown. My daughter has a son, and he is close to fifty years old now.

Interviewer: Really?

Dolvin: And he has two children. That's about my immediate family. My wife and I together; she has three daughters and they have children, so we're a pretty good-sized family when you get down to it.

Interviewer: Well, Mr. Dolvin, I just want to finish up by asking you what it means to you to share your experiences in World War II.

Dolvin: Well, I'm lucky I'm still here and can recall most of them. Those were exciting times, and not being hurt seriously... they were good times. I wouldn't take anything from the experience, but I wouldn't want to do it again.

[Dolvin laughs]

Dolvin: But it was good to be here and to share with you.

Interviewer: Well, thank you very much, and we will end there.

Dolvin: Thank you.