Interview with Iver Yeager

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Friday, July 20, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and today I'm in Jacksonville with Iver Yeager. Good afternoon, Iver.

Yeager: Good afternoon.

DePue: We are here to talk to Iver about his experiences in the Navy during World War II. But, the first time we met, I found out that Iver, you've got an incredible story, just growing up. I guess it's typical for a Depression-era story, but I think it's an important one. We're going to take plenty of time today to kind of lay that out. Let's start with just telling us when and where you were born, and we'll take it from there.

Yeager: I was born in 1922—April twenty-fourth—in a little town called Yoder, north of Torrington, Wyoming, in the southeastern part of Wyoming. My father was a newspaper man and was publishing a small, weekly paper called the *Goshen Hole News*. Goshen Hole was the name for the region. It was a fine irrigation project, and I think, through the teens and twenties, quite a prosperous town.

When I was two, the family moved to Denver, and they took me with them. So, my first memories are of life in Denver, Colorado. At first we lived in a large brick house on South Elati Street. I was with my mother and older brother. Our father, by that time, had gotten into advertising and was on the road much of the time. But at any rate, we were living there in South Elati Street in this large brick house.

Anson and Iver Yeager in Denver, 1924.

But in 1928 the family purchased a new home on South Corona Street, 1625 South Corona, on the southwest side of the city. We enjoyed life there. My brother and I took some turns at being salesmen. We could go to a local store, check out a box of popcorn and sell it for ten cents a bag. If we sold ten bags, we got the last one free, or we got ten cents as our pay. Sometimes we sold magazines, but I was not a very effective salesman. I think my older brother was much better.

One memory is of going outside after a hailstorm and filling our wagon with hailstones. Many of the greenhouses in Denver, at that time, were shattered by all of the hail. We had no damage but had a lot of fun with the hailstones.

Another very vivid memory happened in December of 1928, when I was about six and a half. My younger brother was about a year old, and my mother was wrapping Christmas packages just prior to Christmas. She had seated my little brother on the table, so he could watch and be there while we were working. Somehow he found a penny in the box of Christmas wrappings my mother was using. He put it in his mouth, and he started turning blue. My mother said, "Run over to


Anson, Elise, Iver Yeager, 1925.

the fire station and get help." So, I dashed out the back door, cut across a vacant lot to the firehouse and rushed back with a fireman. Happily, by that time my brother had coughed up the penny, but it was quite a scare.

We lived there until 1930, when my father was unable to get work, unable to support us. He left it to our mother to take, now, three sons with her to return to western South Dakota, to the area where her father had homesteaded. They came over from Norway when she was six. It was about 1910, when she was about ten years old, that they located on a small farm or ranch, actually, in western South Dakota. The distinction is that, in a ranch, you make most of your living from livestock, and that was the case with us. We did some farming, but it was incidental to the livestock…primarily cattle, at that time.

DePue: I wanted to jump in here a little bit.

Yeager: Yes, of course.

DePue: To kind of put a couple of markers in here, when we met the first time, you showed me a couple of things. You've written extensively on the history of your own life, and I'm holding in my hands right now, the *Autobiography of Iver F. Yeager, 1922 to 1940*. I know you've got another volume that we'll get to next time, which deals with your experiences on the *U.S.S. Dyson,* during World War II. All of this is illustrative of a gentleman who spent his life in academia, teaching history and religion and philosophy?

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: And you've done that here in Jacksonville at Illinois College primarily?

Yeager: Yes. And I taught at two other colleges before we came here. That was for a total of six years after my graduate study at the University of Chicago. I came to Illinois College, actually, as dean of the college, so I wanted to try academic administration. After twelve years as dean, I returned to teaching, voluntarily, and spent the next eighteen years as a teacher of religion and philosophy, both from historical points of view.

DePue: Now I want to jump way back and ask you to talk about both your parents. Let's start with your father's background and maybe even going back farther than that, because everybody's got an interesting family story, and yours is certainly in that category.

Yeager: Well, I think I should start with my mother's father. He was the first—and actually the only—grandparent I ever met. The other three, my father's parents and my mother's mother, died before I was even born.

DePue: And what was his name?

Anson Yeager and Anders Thingelstad holding Iver Yeager in South Dakota, 1925.

Yeager: Well, my mother's father was Anders Thingelstad, T-h-i-n-g-e-l-s-t-a-d. It means "the place where the *Thingel* met." The *Thingel* was a council, maybe even a tribal council, though they were not, I think, basically a tribe. They were farm people in Norway, about fifty miles north of Oslo. But life was hard in Norway, and my grandfather did not inherit land from his mother. She had two farms and chose to leave one of them to another son and kept one for herself.

So my grandfather made his living as a cabinet maker. He could make very beautiful furniture and at my request made some skis for us, after we moved out to South Dakota. He was a farmer then and a cabinet maker. They came over from Norway in 1906 with two sons, my uncles, and my mother and her sister and aunt.

DePue: Went through Ellis Island, I would assume.

Yeager: They went through Ellis Island, yes, and were admitted to this country. Even though my mother was still quite young, she remembered that quite vividly and was always proud of having gone through Ellis Island and becoming naturalized, of course, through her father.

So, they settled on this homestead in northwestern South Dakota, about ninety miles south of the North Dakota line and about eighty miles east of the Montana-Wyoming line, in a country that was typified by buttes and canyons and some rivers and quite a few creeks. We called them creeks.

My memories of my years there, from the age of eight in 1930, until I graduated from high school, was having a home base and a small ranch in western South Dakota. For some years, we lived with mother's uncle, who had also emigrated from Norway. He was a very kind man and took in his niece—my mother—and her three sons. In the prosperous twenties, he had built a four-room house, and we (laughs) helped fill it, the four of us.

DePue: What was his name?

Yeager: His name was Iverson, Thorvald Iverson, I-v-e-r-s-o-n, and the first name was Thorvald, T-h-o-r-v-a-l-d. He was very kind to us, took us in. I think my mother, as a housekeeper and a gardener and seamstress and all the rest, fulfilled all responsibilities she possibly could to help my uncle and make life pleasant for him. But we were indebted greatly to him for those early years in South Dakota.

DePue: What was your mom's first name? Yeager: My mother's name was Elise, E-l-i-s-e, Elise Marie Thingelstad, born on March 30, 1899. She went to a one-room school. We have a picture of it. It was a one-room sod schoolhouse with, I think, one window, basically, and a door. It was located a couple of miles from where my mother's family lived, on the hillside of a butte out there. She was very fond of the teacher she had, a Miss Alexander. She went to school with about half a dozen other children, some of whom later became relatives to us. She went to high school in Deadwood, South Dakota. There was no high school in our area.

Sod schoolhouse in Meade, South Dakota, spring of 1911. Iver's aunt Mony Thingelstad and his mother Elise Thingelstad are third and fourth from left.

Deadwood, on the edge of the Black Hills, about ninety miles away, offered an opportunity for her. It was a thriving, mining town close to Lead, South Dakota, which was the home of the famous Homestake Gold Mine, which I think produced more gold than any other mine in U.S. history. Unfortunately, the folks didn't have stock in that mine. But she lived with a family. Manny Falstead was a tailor and quite a successful man. His wife was helpful, but pretty strict, and I always thought a rather severe person. We were required to call her Aunt Gussie. She always required a kiss on the cheek. My brother and I always were a little reluctant to provide that kiss. But she taught my mother many things about homemaking, keeping a neat household and setting a nice table.

My mother always profited from that. She was a fine hostess, a very good cook, and she always provided very well for us. She was a good gardener. Although we had very little in the way of cash income during the thirties, we were never hungry. We always had decent clothing to wear and a

school to go to. My mother had provided very well for us. We raised most of our food. Bought sugar, coffee—I didn't drink coffee in those years—and sometimes a jar of peanut butter. We lived on a very few hundred dollars.

The year before I went to college, which was the year 1939, the cash income for the family was $400. That doesn't sound like much, and it wasn't. My mother was very thrifty. She added to it by raising turkeys and chickens. One time in the summer, I took nineteen dozen eggs to the local store, about a half a mile away. It was a country store. The pay was seven cents a dozen. In those days, chickens worked only in the summertime and only, of course, in the daytime. All people had lots of eggs at the same time.

At any rate, we raised our own food. We had hogs. I learned how to butcher hogs at an early age and to help with the butchering. I learned how to take care of turkeys. It was my job to chop the head off a chicken for a spring fry. My mother made very good fried chicken, and we always enjoyed that, of course. We had good vegetables from our garden. So we really got along well. We didn't realize—or I didn't—that we really were poor, but most other people were too.

DePue: You mentioned how much the family made in 1939. I think you said $400. Was 1939 a good year, or was that a bad year for you?

Yeager: I really don't know how it compared, with cash income. My guess is it was more limited because, by the end of the year, things had collapsed. I think probably the late twenties had been prosperous years for the people who were in farming and cattle raising. Then, in the thirties, prices went down. Money was hard to get.

DePue: Well, I know that, in American agriculture overall, those early thirties were especially, horrendously tough years for them. That's why I would think that 1939 was one of the better years that you would have had in the thirties.

Yeager: Well, it may have been. But I should mention that my mother and father divorced in 1932…I think late 1932. My mother divorced on the grounds of non-support. My father never really took care of us. My older brother was quicker to realize than I did that, in fact, our father abandoned us and left it to our mother to take care of us.

DePue: What was your older brother's name?

Yeager: His name was Anson. He was named for our father's younger brother. Our father was the oldest in a family of six. His father—the one who had been in the Civil War—married after the war was over and had two sons and four daughters. He died in 1890 of tuberculosis.

We have some of the letters that he and his wife exchanged during this period, and they're really pitiful to read. You read about his suffering from the coughing and losing blood and having great difficulty. His wife, my grandmother, wrote, saying, "Dr. So-and-so may be able to help. He promises that he can give you some help." Well, the help was never sufficient or never came in time. He died when my father was fourteen. His wife died in 1893… again, long before I was born.

DePue: Do you know if your grandfather saw any serious combat during the Civil War?

Yeager: Yes, he was engaged in battles in Florence, Chickamauga, Chattanooga and Atlanta. There were some others. In later years, my younger son accompanied us when we made some trips into the South to visit some of these battlefields. One of the most vivid experiences was noticing the contrast between the monuments erected on behalf of the Union, beautiful, polished marble columns and mausoleums of considerable height. By contrast, there were very simple, hardly noticeable, small markers to indicate where our grandfather's regiment, for example, had fought in one of the battles at Chickamauga.

DePue: Do you know which regiment he belonged to?

Yeager: [Yeager added this information later] He was a private in Company G, 29th regiment, Tennessee infantry.

DePue: Union or Confederate Army?

Yeager: He was in the Confederate Army. I hadn't realized that my father was (laughs) really a Southerner. As I said, we had very little contact with my father, and I never really learned about the family background until later years. But I grew up, first starting in Colorado and then in South Dakota, and I was always a "Union man."

One of my proud experiences was when I was starting my eighth grade. I had won a trip to the state fair in a spelling contest, and we stopped at the State Capitol in South Dakota in Pierre. The guard and guide at the State House was a man who had been in the Union Army, and he had shaken the hand of Abraham Lincoln. So I got to shake the hand that shook the hand of Abraham Lincoln.

I was always proud of being a Union man, not knowing that my (laughs) grandfather had been in the Confederate Army. In later years, I talked to a sister-in-law—my wife's brother's wife—who was from the deep South, in Alabama. She was a lovely person, a very liberal person. I was joking with her. I said, "Anne, I just got used to the idea that my grandfather had been a Confederate soldier, when I learned that his father had actually owned a slave

named Steve." My sister-in-law was a very nice person, but she gave me the biggest putdown I've ever had. She said, "Iver, I feel sorry for you." She had gone through far more than I ever did, trying to understand her background in slavery, as a white person and profiting from slavery. So, she had a lot more to forgive than I did.

At any rate, making that longer story maybe short, I can go on from there to the one-room school in South Dakota. If you're ready, I'll make some comments about that.

DePue: Well, before we get there, you haven't talked much about your father. We were just talking about your grandfather. But what was your father's career, before you guys ended up in Wyoming, of all places?

Yeager: Well, for several years of my life, I think the family was quite prosperous. We had a nice house, a rather large house. My mother had a cabinet phonograph, a wind-up phonograph, lots of records. We have pictures of her. She dressed sometimes like a flapper, the short skirt and long beads hanging down, big floppy hats, nice clothing. There are pictures of my father and my mother together, down in the South, I think, in Galveston, Texas. They traveled quite a bit in the early years of their marriage.

My father apparently kept the family in pretty good condition during those early years. But, again, as my mother later put it, "I kept waiting for him to come home." He was on the road most of the time, so we really didn't see much of him. But I was very fond of him. He always would give me a nice gift for my birthday, and then, for Christmas, we would get things like an electric train or a bicycle or something like that. So those were prosperous years. But once he lost his job, he never really recovered from that.

DePue: Well, I know that there was a time—and this is before, I think, you came along—but he was down in Texas. You mentioned, when we first met, that he was in the newspaper business.

Yeager: Yes. Well, that's how they happened to meet, I think. My mother, after high school graduation in 1917, went to work in Douglas, Wyoming, for a newspaper. Apparently, at that point, my father was traveling, primarily in advertising at that stage, not news as such. I think they met as a result of that. He stopped at this newspaper to talk to the editor or publisher and met my mother. She was my father's second wife. His first wife was the daughter of a big rancher, just south of Fort Worth, Texas. Apparently, at the height of his ranching, he had thousands of acres.

But her parents were opposed to her marriage to my father. They didn't think it proper for a rancher's daughter to marry a man who earned his living wearing a white shirt. Only a rancher was a suitable husband.

According to one of my older half-brothers, her parents really broke up the marriage. So, before my mother married him, my father already had a family. She said that she had known that he'd been married before. But, only two days before the wedding, she learned that he had three sons, and apparently he hadn't taken care of them either. So he had a history of non-support. Well, to condense the story of the family, after my father and mother divorced, my mother married Nels Afdahl. His last name is A-f-d-a-h-l. He was a handsome Norwegian, born in Norway, like herself, who had a ranch adjacent to my great-uncle's.

DePue: This would have been South Dakota?

Yeager: This was in South Dakota. In that marriage, my mother had three more sons. To keep things straight, the first family was three sons, with my father and his first wife. My father's second marriage had three more sons, with my mother as the parent this time. Then my mother had a second family, with three more sons, no daughters. So, I was the middle son, in the middle three. Three older half-brothers, an older brother and a younger brother, and three younger half-brothers. So I have quite a family. My wife was always amazed at how many relatives I had. (both laugh).

DePue: But my guess is that you didn't have much relations with your three older brothers. Is that correct?

Yeager: That's correct. There was a short period when I corresponded with one of them, Frank, who had entered the consular service. The first wife of my father obtained a ranch in southern Texas. She and her three sons lived on that ranch, and my older half-brother, Frank, said, "I didn't know I wasn't a Mexican until I went to school." But he said, "I learned Spanish fluently, along with English, and as I grew up, I found that that was very useful." He became the consul in the consular service, serving in places like El Paso, Texas, and a period down in Colombia, South America. Well, I had some correspondence with him.

But it's plain that the family in the South did not really want to have much to do with the family in South Dakota. I imagine that they blamed my mother for the divorce, though (laughs) she wasn't in the picture at all at that point. They never really forgave my father—who was supposed to be perfect in their eyes—for the unfortunate life of the older family. So we had little to do with them. But at Christmas time, my Aunt Fannie Lu, down in Houston, Texas, taught commercial subjects, including typing in a Houston high school. She would send us, usually, $10 for Christmas, which was really quite a gift. Another aunt might send us $5. Another aunt, who taught music in Hollywood, California, would send us a box of glazed fruit from California.

DePue: Was this $5 and $10 per person or to the entire family?

Yeager: To the entire family…actually, to the sons. My mother was very scrupulous. There was workmen's compensation funds from my father. He died in a car accident in 1934, April nineteenth, five days before my birthday. I wondered why I hadn't gotten any gift from him, and then I learned, the day after my birthday, that he'd been killed in an auto accident on April the nineteenth.

DePue: So, that was four years after he had kind of left the scene. What were your reactions to that news?

Yeager: I'm sorry?

DePue: What was your reaction to hearing about your father's death? He'd been out of the picture for a while.

Yeager: Well, I was very saddened by it. That made me very sad, because I really had idealized him. You can use that word. I idolized him. My older brother, I learned later, was more sensible about him and realized that (laughs) it wasn't a good relationship to begin with. I think I grew up and had a better life because my father didn't have a role in my life to amount to anything.

DePue: Just one or two more questions about the years in Denver. You were very young at that time.

Yeager: Yes, yes.

DePue: For most people that age, it's before our memories form. But would you describe, as much as you can remember those years in Denver, as happy years for you, personally?

Yeager: Yes, I think they were happy years for all the family. My mother never complained to us about our father. She (laughs) was a good Norwegian. She took life with all of its hardness, in her stride, and she protected us, really, from the bad effects of the relationship. She did all she could, I think, to make up for it. I think, frankly, she did a good job in raising us three sons and in raising three more sons, later.

DePue: Nineteen thirty was, of course, early in the Depression years. By that time, lots of homes and farms were foreclosing. Was that the situation that caused the move from Denver in 1930?

Yeager: Well, my father, sometime during 1930, was no longer able to get work, and we had to move out of our new house to an apartment building. I remember it as an old, somewhat run-down, duplex apartment on another street in Denver. Well, I wasn't sensitive enough to realize that we were (laughs) downgraded. We were able to make the trip from Denver to western South Dakota, because of my mother's sister and her husband.

My mother's younger sister lived out in the same area of South Dakota where the family had settled. She married a man who was a very successful rancher and storekeeper. He had a country store, selling gasoline, along with groceries, and had a ranch on the side. My mother's sister and her husband, Paul Lehman, L-e-h-m-a-n, had their first son, who was a little younger than my younger brother. His name was Paul. We called him Little Paul. He was born with club feet. So, in 1928, soon after he was born, his parents took him to Denver, where he could have treatment for the club feet and had his feet straightened out.

My uncle then delivered bread. Apparently he made a good go of it as a bread salesman. He earned pretty good money and was able to buy a 1930 Ford, two-door coach. The coach had a full backseat but only two doors, not a four-door. At any rate, they were ready to leave, when we had to leave South Dakota, fortunately.

DePue: You mean Denver?

Yeager: They were ready to leave Denver, because they no longer needed to remain where the doctors were. So, my Uncle Paul had a four-wheel trailer hitched to his Ford car. They put their own belongings in the trailer and were able to put some things for us in the trailer, so, together the two sisters and their families, traveled in this Ford from Denver to western South Dakota. It's about 450 miles.

DePue: Iver, you keep saying "western South Dakota," as if it's not close to any kind of a town that you moved to. (both laugh)

Yeager: That's quite the case. The nearest town, really, was thirty miles to the east. Going the other direction, the nearest town was fifty-five miles away. This was on a federal highway, U.S. 212. But there was a stretch of that highway for seventy miles that was not even graveled. We had a dirt road—a federal highway—a dirt road [that] didn't really get paved decently until the Missile Crisis, but that's another story.

At any rate, my Uncle Paul and his wife were in the front of the car. My Aunt Mony had to hold the baby in her lap. My mother and her three sons were in the backseat. It was a full car. The biggest adventure on that trip was when we were crossing a broad area in Wyoming, where the water was running over the highway, maybe about a foot deep. Ahead of us there were cars in the ditch on either side. We came to that point. My uncle drove straight across. It must have been, I would say, more than a hundred yards—longer than a football field—where the water was flowing over the highway at a uniform depth. It was quite level.

In later years, I asked my uncle how he could do it, when those other drivers couldn't. Well, the other drivers would be distracted by the current and kept watching the water. They couldn't keep their bearings. He said, "Well, it was like plowing. When you plow, you have the first furrow straight, and you fix your eye on a point, preferably a post that you put up on the other side. You just watch that, regardless. You don't look either way. You just look at that point and head right for it." He said, "That's all I did. I just kept my eye on the other side of the road, (DePue laughs) where the water had not covered the road." So, we went across without incident. That was a big adventure, I thought.

We were going to spend August out in South Dakota. We had been there a couple of years before in the summer. I liked to see my uncles and my grandfather and see their ranches and play out in the area, so I thought it was a great adventure.

I really enjoyed going to school out there too. I'd been in Denver schools. I started school at mid-year, so I had four and a half years of schooling in Denver, before we left Denver. Out in South Dakota, I went to a one-room school with my older brother. The school was two miles away. There were probably about a dozen pupils, altogether, and most, if not all of the grades, one through eight, were represented. One large family who lived in the same district usually had four or five children, most of them daughters, in the school at the same time. But I thought it was great fun to be in this little school, and I found schoolwork enjoyable. I did very well in school and really enjoyed it.

DePue: You mentioned your mother went to a sod, one-room school. What was the construction for this school?

Yeager: It was a framed building, with three large windows on the east side. There were no windows north or south, because that's the direction of the wind in the winter, so you didn't have windows on that side. It was a one-room building, with ample room for a huge stove, fired with wood and soft lignite coal in the wintertime. We had a well out in the yard, where we could get our water. Now there were two privies in the back of the school, boys and girls.

We would be there at 8:00 in the morning and have a recess in mid-morning, about fifteen or twenty minutes, when, in nice weather, we'd go out and play. We usually had an hour for lunch, which gave us time for lunch and roaming around. In the spring, we'd go out looking for crocuses and other wildflowers. In the wintertime, we'd play games in the snow. There was always snow in the wintertime. So, anyway, I went to that same school building for five years but with three different teachers in that time.

DePue: What do you think of the quality of the teachers you had?

Yeager: I think that they were excellent.

DePue: Mostly single women?

Yeager: They were all women. For grades three and four, I had Anna Hill, a woman I suppose, at that point, fifty-ish, who had spent her life in teaching and was, I think, very good and a very nice person. She drove down from her husband's ranch, ten miles north of us, every day in decent weather. She stayed with a family in the wintertime, at Maurine, another little crossroads area, where the country store and post office were located.

DePue: Not enough people though to call it a town?

Yeager: Population was maybe, at most, ten. (both laugh) Most of them in one family.

DePue: Okay.

Yeager: And I think she was a very, very fine teacher. Then, the next year, the teacher was Faye Haines Teske, Faye Teske. She was a rather severe person. You didn't fool around with her. I think she probably was a good enough teacher, but her husband was out of work. Her father, who was a very big rancher, north of us, built a one-room house for them, on the school grounds, for that one year, and they lived in it. I think her pay was probably $50 a month, paid in warrants, which were promises to pay when the local school district had enough money to pay. Payment was made, according to the date of the warrant. I think the teachers had to take a 10% reduction to get cash for their warrants.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Well, we took a quick break. Iver, you and I can pick it up with your discussion of the teachers you had.

Yeager: Well, the teacher I had, when I was in grade six and seven at the Red Top School, where I had already been for three years previously, was Mary Hill, the daughter of Anna Hill, my first teacher out there. Mary was a wonderful person. She was, I think, not much more than a high school graduate. She maybe had a summer school and possibly a year of normal school to prepare for teaching, but she was apparently a born teacher. Her mother was a teacher, and that may have helped. She was a very lovely person, pretty too, though I was a little too young for that. She loved reading.

Every morning, we'd start school with reading from a book, sometimes a girl's book, like *Anne of Green Gables*; sometimes a boy's book, like *Smokey, a Story of a Horse*. We'd have a chapter of a book, and then we'd spend the day in classes. She was very creative. We did a lot of artwork.

We would make paper-bound books, making endpapers in our little books. There would be a story, maybe an essay, or maybe just examples of Palmer Method penmanship, in these books. We painted silhouette pictures. I made a couple of those. You put a silhouette picture under the piece of glass in a small frame and paint the outline and fill it in. One of my pictures was a little boy, tugging on a cow that wants to go the other way. So, she was very creative when it came to reading. She was very creative in artwork.

She was also creative in music. She was the one who really taught me to love music. She had some good songbooks. She taught us many different kinds of songs, popular songs, patriotic songs and Stephen Foster songs. We had a rhythm band. In a rhythm band, you have different instruments to make sounds. For example, sand blocks—which make a nice grating noise—cymbals, drumsticks, drums, a kazoo or two. She taught us a lot about many things. We had a very varied curriculum, and we learned the basics too. She didn't neglect the three R's.

DePue: Well, I'm always curious, when you've got a one-room school environment and you've got that many grades, all sitting in the same classroom, how does the teacher keep every one of the grade levels challenged? Do you get to be doing a lot of teaching yourself, once you get a little bit older?

Yeager: Well, that's one of the ways you do it. You have the older children hear the younger children recite. One of the beauties of the one-room school was that you learned everything at least three times. You heard the older children when they learned it; you learned it, when it was in your grade to learn it, and you heard it again from the younger children. So, I think the multiplication tables and spelling and things like that really were pretty deeply embedded in us by the time we finished eight grades.

Now Mary was the teacher for those two years and a wonderful teacher. At that point, because of changes in the residence in our own school district, we were on the other side of the highway, which was the dividing line. Our district paid tuition so that we could attend the Red Top School. That was so that they could keep the one school they had, located where they had more students attending.

But, when those families on the east of us—maybe six or seven miles east of us—no longer had school children in the elementary grades, then they could move the schoolhouse closer to us. So, for grades eight, nine and ten, I attended a one-room schoolhouse in a different location. It was located about a mile southeast of us. The Red Top was two miles west. This was a mile southeast but across a deep ravine and up a steep hill, so we were high on a windy hill. At that point, after grade eight, where we had a good teacher, we had university teachers.

The Haines family, who were the most prominent, most well-to-do family in the district—they had a big ranch—wanted their daughter, Lillian, who happened to be in my class, to take Latin. Since Lillian had Latin, I had Latin. There were the two of us in that freshman class. There were five in the school, three elementary children—one of them, my younger brother—Lillian, and I. The next year, for our sophomore year, we had six other students. A couple of girls from north of us roomed with another family in our district and attended the school, as did Elizabeth McTighe, whose family lived two miles west of the school.

My best friend, Calvin, who lived only twenty miles from our house on another ranch, lived with us during the week and went to the school. Then, a girl named Elma Janke lived with the Haines family and attended school with Lillian. So we went from two in the freshman year to seven in the sophomore year and still three elementary students. We had a different university teacher that year, but also a university teacher who could teach Latin for the second year.

Well, after that, we had to go to Newell. Well, we didn't have to go to Newell. We had to go away to go to high school for our junior and senior years. Most students went to Faith, which was thirty miles east of us. But it didn't have a very strong reputation as an academic high school. Again, I'm sure it's probably the influence of the Haines's, but we wound up going to Newell High School.

Newell was fifty-five miles west of us. It was in the irrigation district, made very fertile by the huge dam, at that time, the largest earthen dam in the world. It supplied water for thousands of acres of land, which were very prosperous. There also were a number of university-educated men who were associated with the experimental farm, associated with the irrigation district.

So, Newell had the happy circumstance of having a higher-than-average education. It was the first time I ever, I think, saw a man who had attended the university and graduated from the university. It had a higher-than-usual average of men and women who were university educated. So, again, I think we had an above-average education at the Newell High School.

DePue: I wanted to ask you, though, during this timeframe—correct me if I'm wrong—but, it wouldn't have been unusual at all for a young man, especially in farm or rural background, not to even bother with the last couple of years of high school.

Yeager: More than that, many simply dropped out after eighth grade.

DePue: Was that ever part of the equation for your family?

Yeager: No. No, my mother was insistent that we get an education. She herself had to work very hard, but, in her family, she was the first high school graduate. She knew that we had to have an education if we were going to get anywhere in the world. I offered to stay home after high school, because my mother, at that point, had two very young sons, three…four, if you count my younger brother.

My stepfather, by that time, had suffered a lot of rheumatism and, at times, couldn't work. I did a lot of the farm work in my later years out there. One time, when they were building a WPA dam, about two miles from us, my father obtained work in helping to build that dam. He would drive his four-horse team over to the dam site, hitched them to a fresnel and helped to scoop up the earth and build up this dam. Well, there were a couple of days when he was too sick to go to work.

So, he suggested that I hitch up the team and go over and ask Olie, the foreman, if he'd let me work. He said, "Sure." So, I put in two days' work (laughs) on the WPA dam, driving the four-horse team with the fresnel. Anyway, I offered to stay home. I said, "If you let me spend the money I have, I'll buy a tractor, and I'll stay home and work." I liked horses, but I hated to make them work hard when it was hot and the flies were bad. I really wanted to get a tractor. Well, I had five hundred dollars.

When my father died, there was some workmen's compensation involved. It took, I think, about two years of litigation, between Texas and South Dakota attorneys. The amount of the payment was originally $2,500 for my father's family, meaning the family I was in, not the older brothers. But, at any rate, by the time the attorneys were through, it was down to $1,500. My mother put five hundred dollars in the bank for my older brother, five hundred dollars for me, and five hundred dollars for our younger brother. She never touched the money. She was really in great need of it, but she wouldn't touch it. I said, "If you let me spend my money for the tractor, I will stay home." She said, "No."

DePue: I wanted to come back to talking more about your experience in high school, when you went to Newell. That was quite a distance away from where you're living. But, before we do that, I also wanted to find out a lot more about the farm, or the ranch, as you called it. You've already described that. Basically, it was a cattle ranch, but it sounds like you had a little bit of everything, as well.

Yeager: Well, we raised some wheat, some corn, oats, and some barley. Often, in those drought years—and most of the years during the thirties were dry years—if it didn't make any seed, at least you could cut it for hay, for forage for the cattle in the wintertime. So, the farming was incidental to the ranching and the cash crop of calves in the fall. My father, stepfather, usually had about forty head of cattle. So, there'd be maybe thirty-five head of calves, in the fall, to sell.

DePue: How many acres did you have?

Yeager: About a thousand, and that was a small ranch.

DePue: That would sound like an awful lot of land, here in Illinois, especially in those days.

Yeager: Yes. Or at today's prices. But, out there, it took many sections of land. A section is 640 acres. There were ranchers, out there near us, who had as much as thirty sections. Well, actually, I want to change that. They had as much as thirty thousand acres, which would be about forty-some sections. So, if you really wanted to be prosperous, you had to have a lot of land. Land was the really big divider. You could really have the most wonderful neighbors, people who would do anything for you. But, if it came to getting control of some land, they'd do anything to get it.

DePue: Where did Nels get the land? In reading the book and talking to you earlier, I got the impression that he was a farmhand for your great-uncle.

Yeager: No, he had his own land, adjacent to my great-uncle's land. They lived in the same house, actually, but they were not partners in that sense. They had their own cattle and their own land.

DePue: Is that how he and your mother got acquainted in the first place, living in the same house?

Yeager: Yes. Yes, this was a four-room house, and Nels had one room. My (laughs) mother had a bedroom, with a cot for my younger brother, and we had a small living room. My brother, Anson, and I slept in that. We had a cot that had fold-down sides to make it about thirty inches wide. At night, we'd pull up the two sides and put our quilts on and go to bed. There was one other large room, which served as kitchen and dining room. It had a stove in it. That's the corner where we'd put a bum lamb, when we had a lamb to raise in the early spring.

DePue: A "bum lamb?" (laughs)

Yeager: An orphaned lamb, yes. They were called bum lambs. (laughs) People, not our own family, but some of the people in the area, like the Roy Haines' family, had sheep, not cattle. They were a very good crop, because you had two crops a year. You'd have wool in the spring. In June you'd have shearing, and wool would bring in money. Then, in the fall, you'd have a crop of lambs. Sheep reproduce faster than cattle do. Anyway, there's quite a difference between sheep ranching and cattle ranching.

DePue: Well, there's a whole mythology in American Western history about the friction between the two.

Yeager: There was a lot of friction, yes. Well, to get back to the story a little bit about the land, when we moved out there, my stepfather leased a half-section of land on the north side of my great-uncle's farm. A half-section was 320 acres, a mile long and half a mile wide. That was essential, because, especially in a dry year, you had to move cattle from one pasture to another, when the grass gave out. So, that half-section of land was pretty important. Well, every year we'd get a notice from the state that the lease was up and that we could renew the lease, unless someone bought the land in the meantime. If they bought the land at leasing time, then you lost it. But otherwise, you could renew it for the same rate.

Well, that year the notice about the lease being due didn't come, and my folks didn't think too much about it. Thought it had gotten delayed in the mail. Well, it had. But I discovered, as I picked up the mail one day after the lease should have been received, that the postmistress said sheepishly, "This mail somehow got stuck up, above the mailboxes, and I just found it today." Well, it wasn't an accident. Fred Hampton was a pretty powerful rancher/farmer in the area, and I'm convinced that Fred arranged for the postmistress to put our mail in the wrong place. So, we didn't get it, and when I came home with that delayed lease, I said, "I think we should go tell the sheriff."

Well, the sheriff was eighty-three miles away, (laughs) and my mother said, "No, we won't." She said, "Pearl,"—by that time, she called her former schoolteacher by her first name. Pearl was my teacher—she said, "I will never do anything to hurt her, and it would have gotten her into serious trouble, as well as Fred Hampton, if we had filed a complaint with the post office or with the sheriff about this mail." So, we lost the land.

Well, in the meantime, my stepfather was able to acquire a little more land on his side of the highway, (laughs) and, in later years, they acquired another half-section on the south side of our land. So they got along. But even with the 1,600 acres, that was still a small place, compared to those people like Roy Haines and his brother, Martin Haines, and the Weiss brothers, who had maybe 30,000 acres of land. They were prosperous. They could get a new car at least every other year.

DePue: Was it in 1933 that your mother got remarried?

Yeager: Yes, in 1933 she remarried, yes.

DePue: Did you continue to live in that same house with the great-uncle, or did they move to a new location?

Yeager: Well, we lived there for a few months, to finish the school year. When school was out, in the spring of 1933, we moved to Nels' house. He had been able to

purchase a four-room house at Maurine. Maurine was the crossroads of the east-west highway, U.S. 212, and the north-south Bixby local road, a county road running north and south. At Maurine, Bob Price had a store, and for some years, he had the appointment as postmaster. So, he did pretty well. He had customers from maybe ten or fifteen miles around, who would come to his store. Much quicker than going to Faith, which was thirty or so. Depending on where you lived, it might be forty miles away. So, Maurine was really the center of the area, in terms of community, and, happily, we lived only half a mile from that corner.

DePue: You've got a picture in your autobiography of the Nels Afdahl's place.

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: And this is based on an aerial photo in the late 1950s. Does that—

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: …look like what existed when you were growing up there?

Yeager: Well, the ranch buildings would be essentially the same.

DePue: Yeah, it looks like the house, in today's standards, (laughs) is pretty darn small.

Yeager: Well, it was, again, four rooms, one large room for a general-purpose room, dining room, living room. It had a bed on one side of it, a cot, anyway. Then there was a fairly good-sized bedroom for my mother and stepfather and a cot in that room for one of the younger brothers. A small room at one corner was for my older brother and me, big enough for a bed and a dresser and (laughs) a closet, a smaller closet. Then, there was a kitchen. The kitchen generally becomes the center of a house like that. That's where you have the coffee. That's where you cook the food. That's where you have the stove to keep warm in the wintertime. It was crowded.

In later years, after I left home, they were able to build a basement. They put the house over the basement, and that added greatly. They also were

able to have running water, because you have to have electricity to have running water.

DePue: Well, I did have some questions about that, as well. So, were you there when they got electricity?

Yeager: No.

DePue: Do you know what year they ended up getting electricity?

Yeager: I think it was ’53.

DePue: So, well after World War II?

Yeager: Well after. It was a major project to run the electric lines over that vast area, and so it took a long, long, high line to bring electricity. It went right across one side of our ranch. But we had no electricity and no telephone.

We were able to get a radio, I think, in 1935. We bought a radio from Sears that operated from a car battery, and the car battery would operate it for about six weeks. Then, we’d take the battery to Maurine, get it recharged and have the radio again. With the radio we got news, primarily from Sturgis and Rapid City, down in the Black Hills, and we’d get local and area news. Even our own news would get into the news on the radio in those days. We listened to programs like *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *Inner Sanctum*, and *Lucky Strike Hit Parade*. We had a lot of radio programs we enjoyed.

We also took a couple of newspapers. We took magazines, *The Saturday Evening Post*, which had some wonderful stories. One of my favorite series was about Alexander Botts, [Yeager added the last name at a later date.] but he worked for the Earthworm Tractor Company. (DePue laughs) It’s a takeoff on the Caterpillar actually. But he was a (laughs) bumbling salesman who did everything wrong. Didn’t follow the boss’s instructions and got himself into trouble. But, in the end, he always landed a big contract for the company, so all would be forgiven. But they’re delightful, humorous stories.

My older brother subscribed to *The American Boy* magazine, and it had marvelous stories. Now, some of the stories were science-fiction stories. I remember one serial story, called “The Doom Tocsin.” It also had stories about a fat detective who loved Maggie’s apple pie and stories about Renfrew of the Mounted Police. They were high-quality stories, I think. In later years, I got a book of selected stories from *The American Boy* magazine. I subscribed to *Boy’s Life*.

I always craved contact with the outer world. As I would be out in the field haying or mowing or doing whatever, fixing fence, I'd see cars drive by and wondered where they came from and where they were going. If they were local cars, I knew them. I could tell you whether it was a '36 Chevy or a '37 Chevy or whatever it was. But I always wondered about those people who could travel and where they were going. So, whenever I had the opportunity, I traveled too. I won the spelling contest in my seventh grade and won a trip to the state fair, the only time it had ever been in eastern South Dakota.

DePue: Would that have been in Sioux Falls?

Yeager: No, it was in Huron.

DePue: Huron?

Yeager: Yes, actually one of the larger towns in South Dakota in that period. I liked to imagine where people were going. I wanted to travel, and so I also had an interest in the outer world. I learned about the Boy Scouts, so I wrote to find out how I could become a Lone Scout. There weren't enough boys, even if you went for fifteen miles around, to have a troop. So, I was a Lone Scout. I had a scoutmaster, Leslie Gunnison, who was a summertime farmer. He would help me with my qualifications for advancing from Tenderfoot to Second Class. I didn't make it to First Class, because I couldn't swim. We really didn't have a decent place to swim, most of the years I lived out there. I became a Lone Scout and took the *Boy's Life* magazine. It had some stories. Primarily, it was information about scouting. One summer, I went to Boy Scout camp, down in the Black Hills.

DePue: That had to be exciting.

Yeager: It was. It was very exciting in itself and gave me an opportunity to pass the requirement for a fourteen-mile, overnight hike. We were up in the Black Hills, a beautiful area with lots of woods and mountains. So, we took our backpacks one afternoon and hiked seven miles up and down the mountains to get to the location. Well, they had told us when we arrived that the big balloon ascension was to take place from the Stratobowl, sometime in the coming weeks. And they said, "If it is going, it is going to happen while you're here in camp. We'll take you to see it."

Well, when we arrived at our campsite, they said, "Time to turn around and go back. We can take your bedrolls in the truck, but we don't have room for all you boys in the truck. So you'll have to walk back." (laughs) So, we finished our seven-mile hike, our fourteen-mile hike, going back the same day. They took us to the Stratobowl. That's a beautiful bowl in the mountains.

DePue: Stratobowl?

Yeager: Stratobowl, S-t-r-a-t-o, Strato, for *stratosphere*. We saw this beautiful sight. There was this large, pear-shaped balloon rising. It was a light beige color. There were floodlights on it. It was just a beautiful sight to see it rising from the depths of this bowl in the mountains. People looked like they were about that high, down around the Stratobowl. Well, sad to say, the balloon split.

They told us to go to sleep, and we did. We were tired. We went to sleep. They woke us up to tell us the balloon split. There can't be any ascension this morning. So, instead of making the 73,000 mile ascent, (laughs) the balloon went nowhere. Later on, they were able to achieve, I think, an altitude of 73,000 feet, which was an unheard of distance from the earth. I think Commander Stevens was one of the two men slated for the ascension, so that added excitement and disappointment to our trip.

But overall, the scouting week was a fine experience. We had a good cook, a college student from Doane College in Nebraska, who told great ghost stories. (DePue laughs) He could really make our spines tingle, so we sat around the campfire at night. That was a great experience. Then twice, for two different summers, I went to the Presbyterian Young People's Camp in the Black Hills, with people from our local Presbyterian Church.

We attended the Prairie Home Presbyterian Church, organized in 1910. The first minister was a Scottish immigrant, a Presbyterian, of course. He was an educated man with a good Scottish brogue, a very earnest man. He and his wife rode bicycles every other weekend to come to our church. They were stationed at a town fifty miles north of us. The connecting road was a dirt road and not a very good one at that. He and his wife had bicycles, and, weather permitting and roads permitting, they would ride bicycles and come every other weekend to spend Sunday at our church. Then, the next day, they'd go back to Bison, the town where they were stationed. So, we had that part of a glimpse of the wider world.

DePue: Where was the church when you were growing up?

Yeager: It was three miles west of us. Actually, to begin with, the first year it was still meeting in the schoolhouse. We have a picture, which I found in my mother's records, a picture about that long and about that high.

DePue: Just a few inches.

Yeager: I had to have it blown up. It makes a beautiful picture in color. It was tinted. It shows this one-room sod school, where my mother went to school in her early years and where they also had church. There was a group of about forty people. It must have been the day that they dedicated the church, their congregation. Over at the right, you see the two bicycles of the minister and his wife. I may not be able to find that picture to show you. I wish I could.

DePue: I don't think it's in your autobiography.

Yeager: It's not in there, no.

DePue: Well, I'm confused (Yeager laughs) because the names you've been saying here are a lot of Norwegian names and a few German names. But how do a bunch of Norwegians and Germans end up going to a Presbyterian congregation?

Yeager: Well, they were good Lutherans to begin with. My mother was confirmed as a Lutheran, and I'm sure her brothers and sisters were. But there wasn't any Lutheran church closer than thirty miles. So, the Presbyterian Church functioned as a community church. The Ladies' Aid had an annual sale, and they had handmade goods, pillowcases and quilts and all kinds of things, which they made and sold to help support the church. But people in the community, even the Catholic family, participated in the Ladies' Aid, though they didn't ever go to church there. But people in the community who otherwise would not have gone to a Presbyterian church went to it, because that was the only church for miles and miles around.

DePue: You get a real sense, just listening to you, of just how isolated you guys were from most of the rest of society, to a certain extent. I wanted to ask some more questions about the farm itself, or the ranch. I'm sorry, the ranch. Did the family have a car?

Yeager: Yes. My stepfather had prospered. He was a good, hard worker and a good farmer and rancher. He had bought a 1930 Ford Model A coupe, a two-door. It had a hatch in the back and a spare wheel, with tire mounted on the back of the car. He taught my mother to drive. Now this was while we were living with Great-Uncle. I thought it was taking an awful long time for my mother to learn how to drive, because on Sunday afternoon, they'd just tell Anson and me, "Well, look after Robert; we're going for a driving lesson."

Well, I realized later that they had more to talk about than driving. (laughs) They were talking about getting married, I'm sure. So, when they had decided to get married, they gave us a little notice about it and went down to Sturgis—eighty-some miles away—and were married in the Presbyterian Church down there. The minister there was widely known in that region, a good, strong man. He conducted the marriages and funerals for people from a wide area.

So, anyway, Nels had this good car and taught my mother to drive. She would tool along at forty-five, maybe even fifty miles an hour, on this dirt road. But in good weather, it was a good surface. It was a sandy soil, and if it had been graded rather recently, it was really a pretty good road. It was only in bad weather (laughs) that it was a problem.

DePue: What did you think about your mom getting remarried? This would have been before your father's death?

Yeager: Yes. Well, I protested. I said, "Now I won't have any daddy." Well, (laughs) my mother said, "Of course, your daddy is still your daddy." But she never really explained to me what it meant to have a stepfather. I sort of learned that as I went along. He was kind to me. I'd known him for three years as Nels, so I kept calling him Nels. My older brother learned how to say "Pa" before I did. It took me years before I could call him Pa.

DePue: What kind of relationship did you have with him?

Yeager: We had a good relationship. He was not a talker. We'd work out in the fields and have only brief snatches of conversation about (laughs) getting the hay loaded properly or doing something else out in the field or fixing fence out in the pastureland. Most of the land was in pasture. We had a good relationship. He taught me how to do many things, how to sharpen a mower sickle, how to operate a horse-drawn mower, how to harness horses.

The horses looked pretty big to me, when I was ten years old. But I started driving four-horse teams, I suppose, when I was thirteen or fourteen. Well, I had to stretch pretty hard to get a harness up on these big horses. I was a bit gingerly in walking around these big animals, but they never kicked me. They never hurt me.

DePue: Would these be draft animals?

Yeager: Oh, yes. We also had riding horses, but mainly their horses were draft animals. They were our basic power.

DePue: No mechanization when you were growing up on the farm?

Yeager: Well, we had machinery. We had mowers, a planter, a binder to cut the grain.

DePue: But was this all drawn behind the horses?

Yeager: It was all horse-drawn, yes, all horse-drawn. It was several years after I left home that they finally got a tractor, and that really was a necessity. But, no, I learned how to farm with horses, and I liked the horses. But, as I said, I didn't like to work them hard when it was hot and the flies were bad. So, that part of it I did not like.

One of the things I learned to do was how to trim a horse's hooves. Nels would hold the halter on the horse. I'd get down on my hands and knees at the foot of the horse, (laughs) and I would use a chisel for the hammer and trim the horse's hoof. You can't get too close to the tender part. You have to

be very careful and just take the edge, where it's beginning to break and get rough. But you have to do it. Well, sometimes the horses sort of keep their own hooves in shape by running around, out in the pasture. But I was always a little nervous about that because, if Old Chub had ever decided (laughs) to give me a kick, I would have landed in the hospital or worse.

DePue: What was the name? Old Chub?

Yeager: Chub. He was our most powerful horse. In the wintertime, if it was twenty below, the car wouldn't start. So, Nels and I would hook up Chub, harness him to the car, put the car in gear, set the spark and the gas, and pull it until the car started, which it would do. So, he was the most powerful horse we had. He also had a mean streak. My diary in those early years was full of, "This morning I went out to get the horses," and, "In the evening, I went out to get the cows."

But, one day, when I went out to get the horses, Old Chub came at my horse with his nostrils wide open, his teeth bared, and he was going to, I think, bite my horse on the neck. Well, I managed to scare him away. I lashed at him with the ends of my reins and finally got him to leave us alone and got the horses to come in. The next day, when I went out to get the horses, I stopped at the skeleton of a cow that had died and picked up a good-sized bone. I probably would never have won a baseball game, but, when Chub got fairly close, I let fly with that bone, and I hit him right on the end of the nose. Well, a horse's nose is pretty tender. He never bothered us again. (DePue laughs) Well, you get lots of little adventures like that that make life interesting if not difficult.

DePue: You've been talking about the things that you were expected to do on the farm for a while, anyway, and I wanted just to read a couple of passages. This is from page forty-one of your autobiography, and it's talking about the chores that you had. You just kind of started with how this starts.

"I generally had the task of bringing in the horses and cows from Nels' large pasture, chopping the kindling, milking the cows and feeding the calves and carrying buckets of garbage and some grain to the pigs. Nels developed severe rheumatism, and for several summers in the late 1930s, I did much of the mowing and hauled the hay.

With one or two exceptions, that decade was characterized by drought, and we did not have much in the way of crops. Nels managed to get the crops in in the spring, often some corn and usually some wheat and oats. Most of what was produced was used for feeding the animals and chickens. Thistles, as a last resort, provided some hay or fodder, if the crops did not develop. At least one year, we tried some sorghum and grain."

And going down a little bit farther, "Near the hay corral and close to the chicken coop, we kept a large pile of wood, which we had collected from the creeks. It was mostly dry wood from dead trees and branches. We sometimes added some boards, which were no longer useable, and culled from the board pile. When other duties did not require my time, I chopped kindling for use in starting fires in the cook stove and, in the winter, the heating stove in the living room. Near the board pile, we hung on the corral fence, the pieces of baling wire removed from a bale of hay, when we had to purchase that to supplement our own supply of hay.

"Whenever we needed to make a repair, we could often do so by getting just the right piece of wood from the board pile and a length of wire from the fence. I learned then that, when you are thirty miles from town and a hardware store, it pays to be able to make at least some temporary repair, with a piece of wood and some baling wire. Repairing fences was another task of slack times. Fence posts needed to be tamped, to make sure that they were secure, or replaced. And the barbed wire on the fences had to be stretched or repaired when broken."

Now, the reason I like that is the ingenuity you had to have because you were where you were.

Yeager: Yeah. Yeah, I think that was a very important lesson that I learned, how to be independent and make decisions and do things. That stood me in good stead, I think, when I got in the Navy and, in different ways, in other situations.

DePue: Now I'm sure you didn't have indoor plumbing when you grew up, either.

Yeager: (laughs) No, no. No, we had a well-built toilet. Some people had drafty privies, cracks in the boards. Sometimes they didn't keep the fill around the outside. The wind could come in underneath it. It would be awfully cold, sitting on the board, the seat of the privy.

DePue: What do you do in the middle of January, in the middle of the night, when suddenly the urge comes to you?

Yeager: You get up and go. Pull on some pants; put on some overshoes, if there's snow; put on a heavy jacket; light the lantern, if you don't have a flashlight, and go out, regardless of what time it is. But, generally, you saw to it that you didn't have to do that. (both laugh)

DePue: What did the family do for water? Was there a well?

Yeager: We had an excellent well, probably the best water in the whole area and, seemingly, an unlimited supply of water. We had a well that was approximately two hundred feet deep.

Periodically, it was necessary to pull the well. That meant that you would have to hoist the rod. These rods, which were, I think, eighteen feet long, had threads on both ends. So, the rods could be fastened, end-to-end to get 196 feet of rod, down to the point where you had the container that would pull up the water. There was a gasket that would close, so the water would stay in that. When you did that successively, you'd build up enough water in the water pipe—about so big—so that, finally, the water level would reach the top of the well, and you could get it in a bucket, or most of the time, we ran it into the large eight-foot wooden tank for the livestock.

We used a lot of water in the house, of course, for drinking and for cooking and washing. On washing day I might have had to carry, maybe, thirty buckets of water. We used fourteen-quart pails, which meant that, if you filled them almost full, so they wouldn't spill too much, you'd have at least twelve quarts of water, three gallons. You'd have two of those to carry from the well, up to the house. And, if you made eight or nine trips, you'd have enough to fill the boilers on the stove, so Mother could heat the water for washing. And then, you had to carry the water out again.

Then, Mother and Nels were able to figure out how to use a hose to drain the washing machine. Our first washing machine was a wooden one, which had a wooden agitator and wooden gears. My brother and I would take turns doing the washing. We'd pull the handle back and forth to agitate the agitator, to do the washing. We learned how to hold a book in one hand and to pull the crank with the other. We liked to read, so we could read while we were washing.

DePue: That'd be a good time to be listening to the radio, too, I would think, if you could do that.

Yeager: We didn't have one at that point, and (laughs) the radio was in the house, and the washing machine was kept in a small room, adjacent to the kitchen. So, we would have had to turn it up pretty loud to hear it out in the other room.

DePue: Was there a day of the week that you had a chance to clean up, to wash, to take a bath?

Yeager: (laughs) Well, yes. We usually cleaned up on Sunday, Sunday morning.

DePue: Before church?

Yeager: We used a large galvanized tub, and we'd heat a bucket of water to a good temperature and take our bath. Then, when it was all done, we'd empty the tub into a pail and carry it out. Needless to say, we didn't fill the tub very full. (DePue laughs) Maybe a couple of inches or so.

DePue: Did the family butcher some of its own meat?

Yeager: We butchered most of our own meat. Every year, we'd butcher probably two hogs. Made our own bacon. Made our own hams. Put the hams in the brine. We'd buy this seasoned brine, seasoned salt, I should say, from a store and make the brine. So, Nels knew how to do the butchering and how to cure the meat. Sometimes my mother would can beef. She learned how to do that and how to do it quite well.

We seldom killed a cow, because, for one thing, it was too expensive. We could raise it. If we didn't have it to sell, (laughs) we were out quite a bit of money, you know? More often we would buy a quarter. Somebody else would say, "Well, I'm going to butcher. Do you want to get a quarter?" So, we'd get maybe a hind-quarter or maybe a front-quarter of somebody else's beef. You had to butcher a cow in the wintertime, because we didn't have any good refrigeration.

Our first refrigerator was a Servel gas-operated refrigerator that my Uncle Hans—my mother's older brother—bought for her. That was a great addition. We had used an icebox before that. I'd go up to Maurine and get a block of ice about every three days, to keep our icebox cold. But having the Servel gas refrigerator was a real advance, technologically.

DePue: Was hunting one of the ways you put meat on the table, as well?

Yeager: Not really, not for us. We had lots of jackrabbits, but you couldn't eat them. I asked my great-uncle, "Why can't we eat rabbits?" He said, "Next time you kill one, or your brother kills one,"—They were a nuisance, so we'd shoot them with a twenty-two rifle—"I'll show you." So, he hung up the rabbit and started to skin it. After he got it half-skinned, you could see maybe three big boils on different places on its skin. So, (laughs) it didn't make good eating. We also had cottontails, which are much smaller than jackrabbits. If we were able to get one of them, they made good eating. That was like chicken in many ways.

At that time, we didn't have deer. Later on, when they built the big dams on the Missouri River, the deer, which had inhabited the Missouri River Valley, made their way west. About the same time, the antelope, which had flourished down in the Black Hills region, north of the Black Hills, made their way east. So, sometimes there'd be maybe fifteen or twenty antelope or a dozen deer enjoying a feast in our green fields, when the grain was green. That was later on. So, there wasn't any big game to be had then, in that area at that time.

DePue: But the early years—and you would have been quite young during this timeframe—the Dust Bowl was ravaging much of the country. Was that a factor in the part of South Dakota you folks were living?

Yeager: Yes, but not to the same extent. We did have some severe dust storms. The dust blew in, around our trees. My stepfather had planted a windbreak. These were quite common. They were encouraged by the agriculture department to plant a thick grove of trees on the west and north side of your house, to break the wind, in the winter especially. Well, he had half a dozen rows of Chinese elms and willows and other things. The wind blew the dirt from the fields to a depth of at least a foot around the willows and killed them. It also brought a lot of the dust into the house, despite my mother's best efforts. The wind seemed to penetrate any kind of crack anywhere. So, the dust storms were a problem, but not like Oklahoma.

DePue: So, you didn't see all of the cropland blow away, basically. That wasn't the case?

Yeager: No, we never had that much erosion.

DePue: How about grasshoppers? I think you mentioned that you did have a problem.

Yeager: Yes, we had infestations of them. One year, we had quite a lot of poisoned sawdust, I guess it was, sawdust to spread on the fields. We had it in the back of the wagon, and my stepfather would then drive the team at intervals, across the field, while I was in the back, throwing out the poisoned food for the grasshoppers. We didn't think it really made much of a dent in the population, because there were so many of them.

A very common plague, in the summer, was the Russian thistle. In good years, they didn't flourish at all. There was other vegetation. But, in dry weather, the Russian thistles would develop. They would grow into little bushes. From a single root, the plant would spread out like this. It would be branches with thorns on them, very pesky. And when they were dry, very painful, if you got into them with your legs. But they would grow sometimes to be maybe this big around.

DePue: As wide as your arms could get.

Yeager: And whether the big or even the smaller ones, when they'd get dry, they would break loose, and they'd pile up against the fence. They'd take a fence down.

DePue: Well, it sounds like the tumbleweeds. Is that—

Yeager: Well...

DePue: …similar?

Yeager: We didn't have tumbleweeds, I guess, but we certainly had (laughs) thistles that tumbled, like any kind of weed might tumble. They were quite a problem. Then, we sometimes cut the thistles, if there wasn't going to be any growth in the corn or the wheat or the oats that we planted. Or, maybe mingled with them, there would be thistles. If we cut them green, the cattle could eat them. They had a very laxative effect on the cattle. (both laugh) They gave the cattle scours. So, you wanted to be well away from the back end of a cow when it erupted. So, they were not the ideal food, but they were edible for the animals.

We raised our own hogs, and I remember one time when we butchered two hogs. I think that was a year when we had previously butchered a hog. Some years later on, when we had sheep, we would butcher a sheep. I never liked mutton. Ranchers who raised sheep, obviously liked mutton or would eat it anyway, but I never liked mutton. Usually, we had beef available, getting a quarter from some other family, who was butchering, or, once, butchering our own cow. We had hogs. We had chickens, fryers in the summertime and boilers in the rest of the year.

We had turkeys. We'd always have at least a turkey for Thanksgiving and Christmas, as well as shipping turkeys. My mother earned money on the side by raising turkeys for the market. In those days, we would kill the turkey, without slitting its skin anywhere. We'd kill it by hanging it by its legs, inserting a knife and cutting the turkey on the inside, basically cutting either the nerves or the throat, in some way, on the inside. So, the turkey would bleed from the mouth, but there'd be no break in the turkey's skin. After pulling the feathers off the turkey, we would then take the turkey to the house. My mother would take out the pinfeathers, wash the bird on the outside, and then, we'd pack them in a crate.

We would take them to town on the day when the train was due to run. Usually the freight train came and went one day a week. We would ship them to Chicago, and they would last long enough to reach the market in reasonably good shape. If the weather turned too warm when they were shipped, you could lose a whole season's worth of turkeys, of course.

DePue: But the way you're describing this, it doesn't sound like you even took out the innards at all.

Yeager: Oh, no. No, you had to leave them entire. So, when people bought a turkey, they had to remove the innards.

DePue: What was the advantage of not puncturing the skin anywhere?

Yeager: Well, the turkey would have spoiled. Once the air got inside the skin, why, the turkey would have spoiled very quickly. That was to prevent the spoilage that you left the skin intact.

DePue: Now, this is probably another thirty or forty miles away, but you're close to a huge Indian reservation. Were there any experiences you had with the Native American population?

Yeager: Not directly. We would sometimes see an Indian in town, when we went to Faith. The usual phrase was "a drunk Indian," because often, when you saw an Indian in town, he was drunk.

We saw Indians at the time of the annual Faith Fair and Rodeo. This was an annual affair in August, when many Indians would come from the reservation. They'd bring their big, white teepees and camp on the edge of the fairgrounds for a week. They'd put on dances. They'd wear their costumes and war bonnets and put on dances. So, we got to see Indians that way. But otherwise, generally, we saw them (laughs) as individuals, drunk in town.

Their main reservation was over east of us. The town of Eagle Butte was another, twenty-five miles east from Faith. It became the center for the Indians, after the Missouri River was dammed and flooded. A lot of the Indians had to leave that area, so they moved to Eagle Butte. The Indian Affairs built nice homes for them, provided schools.

But the education for Indians was always a problem. My older brother, as a newspaper man, wrote a series of newspaper articles on the various reservations in South Dakota, describing the problems of the Indians in trying to gain an education or in trying to educate them. If an Indian left the tribe and went to Minneapolis to work and made a good living, his relatives would all come to live off him. That was the way you did things. And, if somebody had money, he was to share it. Well, it made it (laughs) impossible for anybody really to get anywhere. So, the plight of the Indians, I think, is still very difficult.

I went to an Elder Hostel in New Mexico some years ago—maybe twenty-five years ago now. They had a lot of Indians—most of them from Maine—who came to the college in that town, because they had a good program in art. The Indians liked to learn their various ways of becoming artists, whether painters or sewing beads or whatever else. But the Indians, one night at this college, put on a play, depicting the plight of the Indians. It really was a pretty somber experience, to hear them tell about their difficulties with alcohol and drugs and money and all the rest. So, I think the Indians are still having difficulty.

DePue: Well, this is a complete change of subject here, but I wonder if there were any special traditions you remember around the holiday seasons, especially for Thanksgiving or Christmas.

Yeager: Well, Thanksgiving was always a big day, and we'd often invite neighbors, or they'd invite us for Thanksgiving. Christmas was always celebrated in the community, at the schools. The school Christmas program was a big community event. People from the area would come from miles around, whether they had children in school or not, for the Christmas program. We would learn Christmas songs. We would learn poetry and sometimes write things for Christmas programs. We'd have a decorated tree in the school. Christmas was a very big event in the year, and we always enjoyed it. Of course, Santa Claus would come with a bag of candy for us, during the evening. And after a while, we got so we could tell who Santa was. (both laugh)

DePue: Well, I think I mentioned that I wanted to go back to your high school experiences, and we've finally got to the point where we can do that. How far away was Newell, again, from where your family was?

Yeager: Fifty-five miles.

DePue: So, what was the arrangement you had? Were you boarding with a family in Newell?

Yeager: Well, the first year I was there—my junior year—I worked for my board and room. My mother and Nels went down ahead of time, talked to the school officials, and they said, "The Gadsden family wants to have somebody live with them."

Now, Jim Gadsden was an electrician. He was in charge of the Black Hills electric office for that community. He also ran the company store. So, if you wanted a washing machine or a dryer, you'd buy it from the company store, which he operated. But he was also a skilled electrician, and he would shinny up a pole in no time with his, not spurs, but hooks. He taught me a lot about electricity, by the way. So, I lived with this family.

They had a small house though. They had two young children, very young. Ruth was about two years old, and Jimmy was less than a year old. They also had a high school girl who lived with them to help with the children and the housework. She had a small room in the house. So, there wasn't any room in the house for me, but they had a big granary building, a well-constructed building, back of the house about thirty feet. That became my house.

One of the first things I did, while I was living in it, was to line the walls with big pieces of cardboard. Jim Gadsden would get the washers and dryers in large cardboard cartons, and I'd take the side of a carton and nail it between the two-by-fours, to keep out the draft. I had a wood heating stove in the room, which I used in the wintertime. Now, in mild weather, it was a comfortable place. I had a good study lamp in it. Jim always insisted that I have good light.

I would come home from school, take care of the chickens, milk the cow, process the milk and I'd bring in the eggs from the chicken coop. Then I would probably spend an hour or two in the evening, sawing wood. There were a lot of trees that were planted along the irrigation ditches, because there was a source of water. Then, there was a whole row of trees, about so big around, the trunks were. They'd been trimmed, but the trunks were about fifteen feet high. So, one of my jobs was to use a one-man/two-man saw. It's about this long.

DePue: About three feet.

Yeager: I'd saw the trees and cut them down, cut them into lengths and use an old car and a trailer to haul the chunks of wood back to the house. Then, in the evening, I would put these blocks of wood and pieces of tree on a sawhorse and saw them into stove length and cramp my hands. (laughs) It really would cramp my fingers. The next day, when I tried to type, it would make it very difficult.

I greatly envied my classmate, Lillian, who also went to the Newell High School, because she was a pianist. So, I thought, "She must have an easy time with typing, (laughs) because she doesn't have to saw wood, and she's a pianist besides." Happily, I made an A in typing. You had to type forty words a minute. I typed 39.5, and happily, the teacher rounded it to forty. (laughs) So, I passed. I got an A.

DePue: Did you think this arrangement that you had with the Gadsden family…was that a fair trade, free room and board for all that labor?

Yeager: Yes, I think I got a good deal. I think I probably got a better deal than they did, because they were generous about letting me try out for and participate in some of the high school activities. The first semester I was there, I was in the boys' glee club. I couldn't read a note, but I could sing pretty well. I would learn the tenor part from the fellow next to me, so I could sing along with it. Anyway, the director of the band and the glee club was the director for the annual operetta and tapped me for the lead for an operetta. Well, (laughs) I said, "I think you ought to choose Carl Oaksall. He's got a better voice than I have. He knows how to sing. Why don't you try Carl?" He said, "I would, but

I can't depend on him. He may or may not show up for a rehearsal." So, he said, "I want you to do it."

Well, the pianist, a high school student, was very patient. She would play the song for me. I suppose it maybe took me going through a song six or seven times, before I can memorize my singing part. Well, the arrangement was that, instead of feeding the chickens in the wintertime at, say, 3:30 or 4:00, when I got home from school, I would come home at noon, on my bike, and replenish the food supply for the chickens, so they would have enough feed for the day. Then, I could stay after school for an hour for rehearsal.

Well, I also was able to take part in some of the debate programs, and that also took some time away. So, the family was really very generous in letting me have some part in the school activities.

Newell High School Speech Club, 1939-1940. Iver is farthest to the right in the front row.

Now, we became good friends. I kept in touch with the family over the years. I corresponded just really recently with Mildred. Jim died years ago, but Mildred was ninety several years ago, and I've been in touch with her a number of times. I sent her a copy of my boyhood experiences, because I mentioned the Gadsden family there.

DePue: Well, I'm looking now at a picture of the Newell football team (Yeager laughs) in 1939, and you obviously played football as well.

Newell High School Football team, 1939. Iver is the second from the left in the front row.

Yeager: Well, the six-man football. Yeah, we didn't have the equipment. We didn't have enough men in the school to have an eleven-man team. There wasn't much competition to make the team, so I got a letter.

DePue: What were your favorite subjects, by the time you got to high school?

Yeager: Well, I really enjoyed Latin, especially my second year, when I could translate *Caesar and his Gallic Wars*. I really enjoyed that and wrote it out. I think I still have my translation. I really enjoyed Newell. My favorite course at Newell was geology.

The teacher was Burns Taft, who was an all-around (laughs) man. He taught biology. That was his main subject. But he was also the director of the band, the director of the glee club, the director of the operetta, and, on Sundays, if the minister was away, he would preach the sermon. He was full of energy and full of (laughs) ideas, and he taught this course on geology. They had to call it "North American Geography," because the state didn't recognize geology as a high school subject. But I had the same course, somewhat reduced, that I had later in college when I took geology. (laughs) So, I knew all the basics, before I got to college. But it was an exciting course.

In the spring, there were four of us who did a lot of things together. One was a long-time friend, Calvin Stomprud, and then Darryl Hanson and Bill Taft. When we had the course, then, in physics or in chemistry, we were a team of four, and we did a lot of things together. I enjoyed both those courses very much.

In geology, in the spring, the four of us decided, as our project, to make a map about three feet wide and about four feet high, out of plaster of paris and shape it enough to show where the mountains were in North America and where the Grand Canyon was. Then, we painted it different colors to show the dominant outcropping in a given region, showing which geological era was exposed at that point. Then, we got to talking and saying, "You know, we ought to go out and see some of this scenery, see these mountains themselves."

So, we talked our teacher, Burns Taft, and our coach, Orville Ronning, to go with us in Burns Taft's car. I was the smallest in the group, so I sat in the middle in the front, but I had a good view through the windshield. So, the two men and I would be in the front. The other three fellows would be in the back. We loaded our bedrolls on the front and back bumpers, and we filled the small trunk with grapefruit, potatoes, a few cans of beans and things like that. Most of our meals, we cooked on the way. We'd buy milk and sometimes cottage cheese and other things, along the way. But we spent eight days on this trip.

We traveled over two thousand miles. We went to Yellowstone and spent a couple of days there. We went up to Glacier Park and spent a couple of days there. Came back across southern Alberta, down through Montana. Saw the copper-smelting works in Butte, Montana, and really just had a wonderful time. Burns Taft provided the car. The other five of us paid for the gas and the groceries. It cost us each about $6.50. Once in a while, we had to pay an admission, but not often. But it was really a wonderful experience, being with the other fellows and also seeing the wonders of Yellowstone and Glacier Park.

DePue: You couldn't even get close to that kind of a price range today, even in inflationary dollars.

Yeager: (laughs) No, you couldn't do it now. We camped outdoors every night, except one. The first night we were in the Little Bighorn's, there was a foot of wet snow, so we rented a cabin. We got the snow anyway. It came in through the chinks of the cabin. (both laugh) But, anyway, the rest of the time we slept outside.

We were at Kalispell, near Glacier Park. Ordinarily we drove only in the daytime, because we wanted to see the scenery and see the geology. But that night, we drove until after dark, so we would be able to enter Glacier Park, first thing in the morning. Then, we stopped north of Kalispell, about five miles.

Burns Taft said, "I'll walk a little ways and find a good place to bed down." Well, he'd gone maybe twenty feet or so, and it was pitch black. We heard a splash. (DePue laughs) We couldn't do anything. We couldn't see what was happening. Pretty soon (laughs), maybe twenty minutes later, he came to us, dripping wet. He'd walked over the bank of the river, fallen in, was swept down to a curve, where he was able to climb out (laughs) and come back to us. So, we almost lost him, but not quite. But we had some adventures along the way.

DePue: Did you miss your family during the time you were going to school? You were spending an awful lot of time away from the family at that time.

Yeager: Well, I did, but I was so busy that I didn't really think much about it. About every four or five weeks, I'd spend a weekend at home. Lillian Haines' family always had a very good car. They would drive down to take her to school, and often I would ride with them. They'd come down to take her home for a weekend quite often, and so I could arrange to come home on the weekend when Lillian was going home too. I'd spend a weekend, about every four or five weeks, at home. So, I didn't lose touch with the family.

But that was the year when my brother George was born, just before I started my junior year. My brother Larry was born just before I started my senior year. But he was born with…I can't come up with the name of the problem, but it's a muscle that grows across the lower esophagus, so that food cannot get into the stomach. So, when he was two weeks old, he had to have an operation in the hospital at Rapid City. The doctor performed this operation, and I went down to see him in the hospital. He was tiny, because he hadn't really had any food for two weeks, couldn't get anything in the stomach. He had needles in his two wrists, and he had needles in his knees. He was just a little bundle of bones and skin.

He grew to be about six-feet-three, (DePue laughs) very strong, the tallest one in our family. (laughs) He became a highway engineer, was the superintendent of highways in northeastern South Dakota for about twenty years, with a staff of 250 people and lots of machinery. He learned how to elevate roads, when the floods started filling the kettle holes that were crossed by the highway. One highway he had to raise twelve feet. If you raise a highway twelve feet, you have to have a base about three times the width of the highway. He had a lot of experience that way. Then, in the wintertime in '93, I think it was, there was an immense amount of snow. He had to borrow snowplows from Minnesota and Iowa to keep the highways going. So, he's been one of the very successful members of our family. He's coming to see us next week, by the way, he and his wife.

DePue: Well, I mentioned, when we started, (Yeager laughs) that you're in Jacksonville, but I know that you're in the process of moving here pretty soon too, aren't you?

Yeager: Yes, at the end of the month. Our son's belongings are in the basement. He's kept a room at home all these years. He has lots of books, a table saw, a band saw, a lot of things over the years. The movers are coming to collect his belongings on the thirtieth and take them to California, where he lives. Then, on either the thirty-first or the first—they don't know yet, for sure—they'll come to collect our belongings, to take them to Denver, actually to Englewood, which is a suburb of Denver. So, we'll be flying—we are certain about this—we'll be flying from St. Louis to Denver on the second of August. Then, we will have a new address, at that point.

DePue: I'm just curious. Is the house that you lived in for a couple of years in Denver still there?

Yeager: Yes, the house is still there. Well, I think it is. I haven't seen it now for probably thirty years.

DePue: Okay.

Yeager: But, I went to see it in the late 1960s. I didn't get back to Denver until after thirty-three years, and one of the places I went was to see this house. Well, we were the newest house on the block, and there were vacant lots adjacent to us. They were building houses in that block.

So, we went back, and here was a completely (laughs) settled community. Trees, you know, had been there a long time. I wouldn't have recognized it. I went around the corner to see if the fire station was still there. Well, there's a fire station in the same location, but it's a nice, modern station, not the one that I knew. (laughs)

We've been back many times. Our daughter and her husband lived there for eight years, after they were first married, in Denver. Our son-in-law is a geophysicist, works for Chevron Oil. Our daughter got a PhD at Berkeley in geography and then, took a master's in hydraulic engineering. So, she worked for some years as a hydraulic engineer. That means that she learned how to build canals and dams and construct drainage ditches and things like that. She became qualified as an expert witness for fishes.

Water rights are very valuable in the West, and if a person can show that he got water from this particular stream on such-and-such a year, he has the right to X amount of water, regardless of the total flow. The next person will get water, if there's some left over, and the next person, and so on. Well, the state came to the conclusion that the fishes have the prior right. They were there before any humans came along. (DePue laughs). So, our daughter would be sent for trials when they were determining who had how much right to how much water of this particular stream. So, she was an expert witness on behalf of the fishes.

DePue: Well, let's take you back to (both laugh) the late 1930s again. We jumped a few decades there.

Yeager: Sorry.

DePue: Oh no, that's fine. You were in high school in the late 1930s. Were you one of the people who would be paying attention to what was going on in the world at the time?

Yeager: Yes, we really did. In my senior year, we had a course in American history, and on Fridays, we had a current-events day. So, we were very much aware. During much of our senior year, we were talking about the Phony War going on in Europe. France and Germany each had a powerful defense against the other, the Maginot Line.

DePue: Okay, you graduated in May of 1940?

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: Okay.

Yeager: So, most of that year was still a phony year. It was May of that year when Hitler moved into Poland, and we suddenly realized that this was no longer a simple, European war.

DePue: Well, yeah, Germany attacked Poland in September of '39, so that whole year you would have been watching that, it sounds like.

Yeager: I was thinking he made an invasion somewhere in May. But maybe it was some—

DePue: April or May of 1940 is when they attacked west into the Low Countries and into France.

Yeager: Yeah, right. Okay. And then, in September, into Poland, okay.

DePue: So, you would have had that whole year, where it sounds like your class was watching that closely?

Yeager: Well, September of '40, I was in college. So, we really had about the last month of high school when things were really beginning to get hot in Europe.

DePue: Were you thinking this was going to have a potential implication in your future?

Yeager: I don't think we gave it very much thought. For one thing, it was still far away. For another, (laughs) the last few weeks of school were full of activities and getting ready for graduation. I think we did not really pay too much attention to it at that point.

DePue: What did you think you wanted to do after you graduated?

Yeager: Well, I knew I wanted to go to college. I just had a keen interest in going into the ministry, but I didn't want just the "plain ministry." I wanted to major in philosophy. So, my older brother had gone for a couple of years to South Dakota State in Brookings, and I decided to go to South Dakota State.

So, in the early summer of 1940, I corresponded with people at South Dakota State and set up a program for a major in philosophy. It was not a strong program because, after all, South Dakota State was primarily an agricultural and mechanical-arts college, not liberal arts. But they did have enough hours for a major in philosophy, so that was my initial plan.

DePue: We're going to get to college in just a couple of minutes, but I wanted to ask a couple of questions here. The first one is, looking back on those crucial years, when you were growing up, who would you say would have the biggest impact on your life, the most influential person in your life?

Yeager: Clearly my mother and, I think, in a positive way. I never became overly dependent in an emotional sense on her, but she strongly encouraged me to go on to school. She did not want me to drop out, even to help on the ranch. She was the most influential. My own father had really very little influence. For one thing, he died when I was, well, not quite twelve.

DePue: How about—

Yeager: I should add another comment about high school. My senior year in high school, I made arrangements to live with the family of the local Congregational minister. I'd gotten to know him and his family because, during my junior year, I went to that church. There wasn't any Presbyterian church, so I went to the Congregational church. That's a story in itself.

But, at any rate, I became friends with the middle son of the Ericson family, although he was three years younger than I. But he was active in the speech activities, including debate, and I got to know him pretty well. So, I asked the Ericson family if I could stay with them. Their older son, John, was a year behind me. They had a family of three sons, but also Edith's mother lived with them, Mrs. Snyder. So, they had a houseful right there.

But John slept in a large screened-in porch on the north side of the house, unheated. They said I could share the bed with John. (laughs) He was hard to get up in the morning. He'd stay up late at night, doing photography or using his telescope, and he'd barely get to school on time. He always slid into his seat in the study hall, as the last bell sounded.

I would get up earlier and go to school. Mrs. Ericson was a fine cook and a very wholesome person. So was Elmer, her husband. This was a very positive influence in my life, and they contributed a great deal to me. So, I lived with them. I paid $15 a month for board and room, which was a bargain, but it was the going rate at that time.

DePue: It sounds like you had an awful lot of influences on your early life.

Yeager: Oh, I did.

DePue: The various people that you lived with, your stepfather and your own parents. Thinking back on those years, what were the things that you did that you most enjoyed, that brought the most joy to your life?

Yeager: Well, certainly, a major part was reading. I loved to read. And not just for fun, although I liked that, but also for information. I liked music, to the extent to which I could participate in it. I enjoyed being with other young people at church, both out at Maurine, at the Prairie Home Church, and the church in Newell. The young people's group there was a strong, active, positive group. Elmer Ericson, the minister, I think, managed a very good youth program for the church. That was very positive and very enjoyable. I loved to travel, and I loved the people I could travel with, whether my high school classmates or, sometimes, adults. So, there were many different aspects of life, which I found enjoyable.

DePue: Were you a good student?

Yeager: Yes. I (laughs) graduated from high school with seventeen A's and one B.

DePue: Where did you rank in your class?

Yeager: Well, I tied for first. Lillian, my classmate for the past five years, likewise had seventeen A's and one B.

DePue: Was there some competition between the two of you?

Yeager: Yes, always. But it was always good-natured, never unfriendly or cutthroat. Oh yes. When we were out at the one-room school and high school, some days I would get a hundred and she'd get ninety-seven. Another day, it would be the other way around. So, I always felt that she was my equal. But, in a letter that she wrote to me in later years, she said, "You were always smarter than I was." (DePue laughs) Well, I didn't realize that, if that's the case. So, we tied. The superintendent called me in and explained the situation. So, I volunteered. I said, "Well, make me the salutatorian, and Lillian can be the valedictorian." Well, that was fine. That's the way it is in the book, but officially we tied.

When I learned, late in the summer, that Macalester College gave a tuition break to students who were number one in their class, I wrote and the superintendent wrote also, explaining that I really tied for first. Otherwise, I could not have attended Macalester, if I hadn't had that tuition break. So, it could have been a costly (laughs) act of courtesy, if Macalester had not acknowledged that I was number one in the class.

DePue: You've mentioned Lillian's name quite a bit in this first session. Were you two strictly friends?

Yeager: We did a lot of things together. When I was eight years old, I sometimes would walk two miles over to Lillian's house with stamps. We both collected stamps. She collected Canadian stamps because they had Canadian relatives. I

collected other stamps, and we'd exchange stamps. The Haines family also had games like Touring, and we would play games. So, we did quite a lot together. There was no girl her age that she found companionable, and I had no boy my age. But we were in the same class, and we really got along very well. We never really dated. We did a lot of things together, but never really dated.

DePue: Maybe that's going to come in the college years, then?

Yeager: That comes in the college years, yes.

DePue: You've already talked a little bit about why Macalester was appealing. Was that the notion, that you could get help on the scholarship? Was that one of the main motivators for going to Macalester?

Yeager: No, the main motivation was the college itself and also the prospect of living in a big city again. I remembered enough about the positive advantages of living in a city, like Denver, that I really wanted that experience. I had a viewbook, along with the college catalog, which described the cultural advantages of the Twin Cities and of being a student at Macalester.

Macalester provided students with three free tickets to the symphony. In my freshman year, I went to the Minneapolis Symphony. We went by streetcar, and I heard Fritz Kreisler, a renowned violinist, Kirsten Flagstad, who was still in good repute at that point, and also John Charles Thomas, a baritone. Now, this was a great experience in music, but I also took great advantage of the museums. For one thing, my speech class required that I visit certain places in the Twin Cities and report on them in class. One of them was the Minneapolis art museums, so I went over and studied Chinese art, especially jade. Gave my report on that.

Another time, I went to the Ford Motor Company plant on the edge of St. Paul. They built the plant where they had the supply of sand, because they made their own window glass and windshields, right on the grounds. I saw the Ford motor assembly plant there.

I really enjoyed the advantages of the city. Well, I found the college very inviting, because of the faculty and the courses they offered. So, it seemed to me, a very rich world, in contrast to what I knew would be the case in Brookings, where it would be a pretty restricted life, a small town and a somewhat remote area.

DePue: Well, I know that the reputation—at least now and I think it was at that time—of Macalester was that it was one of the premier, liberal-arts colleges in the country. Would that have been the case?

Yeager: It was a strong college, but I think that it probably did not have that high a rating at the time. Colleges, in those days, were rated more in comparison with other colleges, related to the same denomination. My first teaching position, after graduate school, was the College of Wooster in Ohio. I went in to talk to President Turck at Macalester on one visit back there. He said, "You know, I wish that people wouldn't always think of Wooster as the Presbyterian College." So, clearly, he reflected the view that most people thought Wooster was a much better college than Macalester. But it was a good, strong college. It had a fine president. The son of that president, by the way, was DeWitt Wallace, who founded the *Reader's Digest*. His father loaned him five hundred dollars. The father said to a friend, "I hope this is the last time he has to borrow money to start some business."

DePue: (laughs) Well, he did all right for himself though.

Yeager: In later years, of course, they provided millions and millions of dollars for Macalester, and it was that financing that really boosted it.

DePue: Okay, you've already given us some idea, but what was your major when you first started?

Yeager: I'm sorry, my major...What?

DePue: When you first started at Macalester?

Yeager: My major?

DePue: Your major study, your focus of study?

Yeager: Well, I went with the idea that I would really like to major in geology. I took the course in geology, and then I realized that, for a geology major, I'd have to have some advanced courses in chemistry and physics. I simply didn't have the math background for that. In the meantime, I found I had greater interest in other fields, such as religion and philosophy.

DePue: Was that the time period you were most thinking that perhaps the ministry would be your future?

Yeager: I had mixed feelings about it, because I was quite aware of the conflict many people see between religion and science. I took the biology course at Macalester, because I'd never had biology. Had a wonderful teacher, who was a very fine biologist. He had a PhD in biology, but he was also an ordained Presbyterian minister. He was a great help in dealing with the relationship between science and religion. He made it evident that you don't have to give up science if you get involved with religion. So, that resolved that conflict.

But I also came to the realization that I wanted my ministry to be teaching, rather than preaching. I was quite aware that it's very difficult to deal with certain issues in religion, if you are a pastor. I wanted to be free to hold the views which I believed were compatible with three ways, with science, with philosophy and with religion. I felt I had a freedom to do that, if I were in teaching, but I would not have that freedom, if I were in a pastoral ministry. So, I never really expected to go into the pastoral ministry.

DePue: I wanted to read something here from your book. The title of this one is *College Years: Autobiography of Iver F. Yeager, Part Two, 1940 to 1944*. This one will get us into the other aspect of how you could afford going to Macalester. We've already gotten into that a little bit, but here's the passage, and this is from page twenty-three. I think you're talking, at this time, about Christmastime. It's a long way from home, and on a couple of occasions at least, you stayed there rather than go home.

"The college dining room was closed during vacations. I tried eating breakfast cereal with water instead of milk, but that really was not appealing, and I then bought milk. In cooler weather, I could keep it a day or so on the window in my room.

At Christmastime, I'd sometimes sub for a friend who washed the pots and pans at the greasy spoon, officially known as the Dutch Mill. This was a modest restaurant, about a half a block from campus, on Grand Avenue. I would get my meals in return. Otherwise, I usually had a sweet roll and a glass of milk for breakfast, costing ten cents; a tuna sandwich on toast, fifteen cents, and a milkshake, ten cents, for lunch; then supper, meat, potatoes and gravy, a vegetable, a glass of milk and dessert, pie or cake or a dish of pudding, thirty-five cents.

The going rate for student labor was thirty-five cents per hour, so I could count on two dollars a day, required for food. Sometimes I bought a small package of day-old sweet rolls, at the bakery outlet on Grand Avenue, just north of St. Clair. My shoes wore thin, and I'd tried using cardboard for temporary soles. It was not (laughs) very effective, and I got a blister on my foot, which became infected. I had it treated at the college infirmary, and the nurse advised me to get some new shoes. I scraped up $2.50 to get them." (both laugh)

DePue: So, you scraped through a lot of different circumstances there.

Yeager: Oh, yes. Yes, money was always tight. One time I actually didn't write home because I did not have three cents for a stamp. Now I'm sure other people would have given me three cents or given (laughs) me a stamp, but I was too proud, I guess, to ask for it. So, I had to wait until the next college payday, whatever that was, before I could buy stamps.

DePue: You mentioned, after your father passed away, that you got this five hundred dollars. Did that go to school as well?

Yeager: Well, I spent some of that money living with the Ericson family in my senior year in high school, and I spent fifty-three dollars for a Corona silent, portable typewriter, before I went to college. So, I had about $250 left when I started Macalester, and over the years, that disappeared too. I finished college $250 in debt to the college. I paid that off, after I was commissioned in the Navy.

So, the money from my father helped, yes. I must have used quite a bit of that for that trip to Winnipeg. When I was reading it over, I read that I wanted to go to Winnipeg and was willing to pay ninety-five dollars. I thought, "My gosh, how did I..." (laughs) I must have spent most of what I had left by that time just going to Winnipeg, but it as a worthwhile trip.

DePue: We've been at this for two and a half hours. (Yeager laughs) I was planning to finish off your college years, but we can pick that up in the next session, or we can spend another fifteen or twenty minutes to finish it up today. It's completely up to you, Iver.

Yeager: Well, let's go ahead.

DePue: Okay. Did you work through most of your college years as well, then?

Yeager: Oh yes. I almost always had at least one college job, sometimes two or three. I often worked part-time off-campus, usually for short periods, a few weeks maybe. But, at the college the first year, I had a job working in the dormitory, delivering the mail twice a day to different people's rooms and assisting the director of the dormitory. That gave me a good contact with an adult. Dan was his name. I've been fortunate that I've had good adult friends in so many places, including high school and college, who have been very helpful.

But later, I became the official recorder for the college, operating the college's Presto recorder. For example, I could cut platters for thirty-minute programs of music, for the choir or a lecture or a program at the convocation at the college. I also cut hundreds of small records for freshmen speech. The speech department made heavy use of this recording equipment, and that kept me busy many hours.

I also worked, sometimes, downtown. For example, I worked for some months at the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company, downtown, in the mailroom, along with two or three other college and law-school students who had come in to handle the outgoing mail. We would process the mail, run the letters through the folding machine and put them in the window envelopes. They always kept a secretary on hand, until the last letter was out, because once in a while, the machine would crumple a letter, and the secretary would

have to retype it. They didn't have anything like a photocopying machine in those days. But that was a good experience. I learned a lot from law-school students, (both laugh) the ones that were working down there.

I worked for most of my junior year at the First Baptist Church. It had a fine minister. Northern Baptists, as they were then known, were, in many cases, liberal Baptists. This man was a liberal thinker in regard to religion, a very positive man. I worked for a year, as the director of the youth activities at the church. The Sunday night meeting was the main requirement. I preached for him a couple of times, when he was away, during that year.

Now, I had other experiences. Sometimes I had jobs putting up storm windows in the fall for people. Sometimes that was a bit difficult. You'd have to carry a storm window from the basement, up to maybe the second floor, put it out through an open window, from inside the house, wiggle it around until you could feel the hooks catch on the outside, let the window hang down and close it. Then, in the spring, of course, you had to take the windows down. There were almost always, in the winter, snow-shoveling jobs. All these jobs paid thirty-five cents an hour. We were close to Summit Avenue, which was the plowed street in those days. It still is one of the grandest residential areas, I think, in the city.

DePue: This is St. Paul again?

Yeager: In St. Paul. We just were a block away from Summit Avenue, and I had a job to go up to an address on Summit Avenue. Well, Summit Avenue, in places, had a boulevard strip in the middle. There would also be through-traffic in the middle and then a service road on either side for people to get to their houses. So, I had the job of shoveling this driveway from the road, past the house—it was a big house—to the sunken garage, a three-car garage. Well, the area was sunken. (laughs) The garage wasn't sunken.

Anyway, there was about fourteen inches of heavy, wet snow, and when I got to the garage, I had to lift each shovelful of snow, carry it over, and throw it up over the bank, about four feet high. As I threw the snow up the bank, I had to throw it further each time to get it to stay up on the bank. Well, this job took me five hours. Then I went in, and when I told her it was five hours, the maid really complained that I was so slow. Well, (laughs) I was so tired I couldn't think of anything to say. I just said nothing. But she did pay me thirty-five cents an hour for snow shoveling.

So, I had many jobs. Twice I worked in the post office, once delivering mail. But it was a very cold winter. There was lots of snow. I was grateful for the two apartment buildings which had entryways, where you could get inside the building and put the mail in the boxes. One kind lady would always invite me in for a cup of cocoa and a cookie in the wintertime.

The next year, I asked for an indoor job. So, I worked in the package department of the downtown post office. A huge conveyor belt would dump package after package on a huge sorting table. People would mail packages with toys and candy and cookies in a flimsy cardboard box, held together by a single thread of flimsy string. Now, when these packages broke open, we did our best to put them back together and to put things in that we thought belonged to them. I worked that winter in the post office in downtown St. Paul. So, I had a great variety of work experiences.

DePue: Did all of this work leave any time for any kind of extracurricular activities?

Yeager: Yes, I kept busy with that. I was active in the Macalester Christian Association. I was always on the committee for planning the religion and life week, where we had a series of meetings, always including one on religion and science. I became active in the student government. I was active also in the History Association, and I should mention that one of my jobs, for about a year and a half, was typing the programs for the college chapel.

So, I got to be friends with the head of the religion department, Edwin Kagin, who warned me about the dangers of Congregationalism, (laughs) when he realized I was drifting away from the Presbyterian Church. But we remained good friends, and he performed our wedding ceremony, when we got married. But I worked with him.

I worked with the dean of the college when I was doing the recording, because I would drive the dean's car over to the public radio station at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. The dean had a Dodge car, with a forerunner of automatic drive, which I finally got used to. I'd have the responsibility of taking the recording over there, and after the recording had been played, bringing it back.

There was a man named Fred Replogle at the college when I went there, who was the director of personnel. He functioned as the dean of students, but, unlike other deans of students I've known, he did not really have any major responsibility for discipline. But he was a very keen-minded person, very sharp, very personable and very helpful to me. I worked for him a lot.

When we had to move out of the dormitory to make room for the Air Force contingent—they wanted to use the college dorm—I was assigned the job of organizing a campaign to solicit possible rooming places for students in the community. We had a good response, and people were quite willing to take students in for a semester to let them finish the year. This had to be done at the middle of the year, in my junior year.

DePue: With all these different jobs you had, it sounds like you were something of a fixture on campus. You knew so many people.

Yeager: Well, I enjoyed that. I really appreciated people like Fred Replogle and Dean Ficken and Dan and others. I got to be good friends with Earl Ward, in the English department. He persuaded me to take my final requirement in English as a course in Chaucer, which he taught. Well, I was reluctant because I was going to take a sophomore course in English. I thought, if I took that upper-class course in Chaucer, I'd be in with a lot of English majors.

Well, I did take the course and really enjoyed it thoroughly and enjoyed getting to know Earl Ward. He liked to prepare recordings of various poetry that he would read for his classes. So, we had picked out some music that he wanted to use as the background for reading T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and I made the recording for him for that. I also got to be good friends with the choir director, because I recorded the choir. So, I had a lot of connections around the college. I really did enjoy the college experience. It was a wonderful experience.

DePue: Well, I want to take you to one particular snapshot of that college experience, and this would have happened, I believe, halfway through your sophomore year, on December 7, 1941.

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: The day Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Yeager: That was a really remarkable experience. It was a Sunday afternoon. I was babysitting for the new house director who had a young child about a year old. Well, the baby was asleep when I went there, and I lay down on the (laughs) carpet in the living room, and I fell asleep. Well, I woke up and turned on the radio. I didn't have a radio, so I turned on their radio. And pretty soon I figured out that something had happened at Pearl Harbor. So, the attack was still underway when I heard about it. That was how I learned about Pearl Harbor.

The next day, we had a college group that met in the theater in Old Main, so we could hear President Roosevelt deliver his speech about the day of infamy. Well, we men knew what this meant for us. You may remember, if you read that far, that in my first month at the college, probably early October of 1940, I signed a petition to keep us out of Europe's war. Along with about a 175 other men, I had my name on that petition. It began, "We, the undersigned students of Macalester College, protest the passage of the Selective Service Act," which I believe was on September 20, 1940. We knew that that act was aimed at us, and we would be the prime targets for the induction into military service, and we had no desire to be part of Europe's war.

Well, the president of the college called an open meeting of the student body late that afternoon and talked to us about it. He said, "Well, you can do what you want to as individuals, but you may not use the name of the college." He was from Kentucky. He had been president of Danville College, in Danville, Kentucky, Charles J. Turck, T-u-r-c-k. He gave us a pretty good talking to (laughs) about what was going on in the world and about responsibilities that he thought we should accept.

Well, I thought he was impugning our patriotism, and so, with a good deal of fear and trepidation, I stood up to speak. I'd never spoken in that kind of situation, in a public way. I said, "I do not think that we are unpatriotic. We simply do not want to be part of what we consider to be Europe's war." Well, he didn't make any retort to that. We later became good friends, but my introduction to the Selective Service was that petition.

When the time came, I registered for the draft. Some of my friends did not. Some of them were conscientious objectors and chose to participate in all kinds of experiments, as an alternative to military service. Well, I concluded, after thinking about it a good deal, that I could not conscientiously say I could not kill a man. I realized that I would kill a man if I thought he were a serious threat to me or my loved ones or my friends or my country. So, I did not become a C.O.

I registered with the Selective Service Board in Sturgis, South Dakota. That was the county seat for Meade County, where we lived. It was the third largest county in the country after, I think, Los Angeles County and maybe Houston. But it was 110 miles from one end to the other. We were eighty-three miles from Sturgis, where the Selective Service Board met, and I registered with them. That led me then, in the summer of 1942, to consider different alternatives of the Air Force or the Army or the Navy. I concluded the Navy was the place for me to go.

The Navy would allow me to join the V-7 program, which was designed to prepare officers for the Navy by having them graduate from college. The Navy wanted educated men for its officers. The Navy was a class society, and officers were set apart and above the crewmen. If you look back to sailing days, you can understand what a great difference that might have been, socially, culturally, educationally, in every way. At any rate, I wanted the opportunity to complete college, which the Navy offered in the V-7 program.

I signed up for that, passed the physical in the summer of '42 and was accepted. My vision was thirty-thirty. The doctor looked at my arms. He said, "You know, your arms aren't quite straight." And they aren't. That's probably why I couldn't pitch a ball very well. At any rate, I said, "I pitched lots of loads of hay." I might even have said, "…and manure, (both laugh) and it

never bothered me. It never restricted my activity." He smiled and said, "It's okay." (laughs) He also said I had a slight murmur in my heart. He said, "Well, lots of people have that. That probably won't make any difference, either." And it hasn't. I'm ninety now, so I've lived with it all my life.

DePue: I wanted to ask a quick question.

Yeager: Yes?

DePue: You said that you signed that petition during the time that Germany and Europe were at war, and you said, "We don't want to be part of their war." After Pearl Harbor, did that change your thoughts about whether or not we should be fighting in Europe as well?

Yeager: Oh, it made a big difference, of course. Yes, I would say that, by the end of my junior year, there were very few of us who were able-bodied—physically qualified—and were not pre-ministerial or premedical students, who were still on the campus. By the time I left the college (laughs), there was hardly anybody left who was not 4-F or headed for the ministry and had a deferment or headed for medical school. So, it made a world of difference in our attitude, to realize that, well, it really was our war.

DePue: Well, there's one advantage to those kind of demographics on a college campus. I would think now, you're a minority. There are a lot more women on campus than men. Would that be correct?

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: Which isn't necessarily a bad thing, is it?

Yeager: No, but that one semester, there were a lot of Air Force men too.

DePue: Was there an Air Force ROTC program there?

Yeager: There was an Air Force cadet program, yes. I think, just for one semester. I'm not sure why they didn't come back, but we had to move out of the men's dorm anyway.

DePue: How closely were you following the events of the war while you were still at Macalester?

Yeager: Pretty closely. I did not have a radio. I did not take a newspaper. But there were lots of newspapers around, and, as students, we talked a lot among ourselves about what was going on.

DePue: Well, I'm sure that you were an excellent student. You've already told us about the very involved work schedule you had and some of the extracurriculars as well. Did that leave any time for any kind of a social life for you?

Yeager: Some, yes. I didn't date very much, partly because of money. Like I said, money was a major problem. But also, I had very little time. I knew I had to do well. Each time I went to a new environment—For example, I went to Newell and then went to college—I wondered how I could manage, whether I could hold my own, whether I could compete. That was certainly true when I got to college. Well, at the end of the year, I found that I was tied with a young woman for number one in the class, and I maintained my number one standing throughout college. I was able to compete.

I was in a freshman biology class, with eighty other students, many of them premedical students. We took a special test in biology. I scored higher than anyone else in that class, including the premeds. That rather amazed me. Well, I didn't know until the end of the year, really, how well I had done. But I felt I had to keep up (laughs) the pace, so I often worked until 11:00 or 12:00 at night. Sometimes I would take a cold shower to wake up, so I could study another hour. I'd wake up early in the morning and put in another hour to study. I learned how to use my time very effectively.

But I did go to social functions. I had a date for the homecoming dance, which is the big social event of the year. My upper-class counselor arranged a date for me with a senior student, Lucy Buck. I had invited a freshman student, Marnie Buck, but she already had a date. My friend Virg said, "Well, she has an older sister, Lucy, who's a senior." So, I called Lucy, and she accepted. We had a very nice time. She was very pleasant and (laughs) didn't pull rank on me. (DePue laughs) We dated a few other times and went to a movie once or twice, but usually I'd stop by her house. Her family lived on the edge of the campus, and she'd invite me over for an hour or so. But, when I came back after Christmas, I decided I really had to concentrate on study. So, I didn't date for a long time.

DePue: Well, I know that there was one other young lady, at least—and this might have been in your junior year—a young lady by the name of Natalee Carlander—

Yeager: Yes, yes.

DePue: …caught your eye.

Yeager: (laughs) Yes.

DePue: I'm going to read this quote that was from page nineteen. It's a very short quote. Then, I'll turn it over to you, and you can tell us more about that. This is, maybe, quite a while before you actually went out on a date with her. "I remember thinking that Natalee was a very nice girl. But she was clearly out of my class, and I did not expect to date her."

Yeager: Well, that was because I got to know a little bit about her. She was starting her freshman year, when I was starting my junior year. I knew her older sister, Beth, who was a senior and a year ahead of me. I didn't know her well. I never dated her. Well, I met Natalee at a freshman mixer, just before the college year started, and I knew that she was Beth's sister. I knew also that they lived in Minneapolis. And, just to get to Minneapolis, meant two streetcar tokens, and it'd mean two coming back.

If I invited her for a date to go to a movie, that would mean four streetcar tokens to go to the movie and back and maybe a treat afterwards. I simply didn't have the money to do it, and I didn't have the time, really. So, I never really considered and even thought about dating Natalee in that first year.

Things had changed considerably the next year. She was living on campus, in the home-ec [economics] house. I invited her for the homecoming dance. This now was in my senior year, her sophomore year. We had a wonderful time, but I, in the meantime, had reflected on it and decided I would not become romantically involved with a young woman at that stage.

I had friends who had girlfriends. I thought they'd rushed into marriage. They maybe had a weekend, sometimes a week, with a wife and then would go overseas. In some cases, that person never came back. So he would leave a widow, and, potentially, he would also leave an orphan or a fatherless child, not an orphan. I did not want that situation.

But, as I became better acquainted with Natalee, I (laughs) decided she was the kind of girl that I really wanted to be in touch with, and I told her so. But I also told her I did not want to develop any formal or definite engagement at that stage, until the war was over, and she agreed with that.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that you were smitten?

Yeager: (laughs) I was.

DePue: (laughs) Who went first? Were you...

Yeager: Oh, I think I did. (laughs)

DePue: (laughs) What was it about Natalee that you were so attracted to?

Yeager: Well, I knew that she was a good student. She was intelligent. I knew that she was very nice and just had very nice social manners and attitudes. She was pleasant. She was fun to be with. She was, for me, a good dancer. I was not a particularly good dancer myself, but she was a good dancer.

It happened that I was on campus during that winter break, and Coach Primrose saw me one afternoon and said, "Why don't you come to my house for New Year's Eve?" Well, this house was about half a block from the campus, and so I went over. And there was the Carlander family. I'd never met her parents before nor her older brother, who was dating a Primrose daughter. Natalee was there and Beth. So, that alerted me to the possibilities, and I invited Natalee to go to the Snow Ball, a dance right after Christmas. Again, we had a wonderful time. The final dance of the evening at the college that year was Hoagy Carmichael's "Stardust." Well, we had a very nice time, so I arranged, probably the next night, to walk her home from the library.

I was working at the library evenings, and she was studying at the library. So, when the library closed, I would walk her home to the home-ec house. When that semester ended, as it did at the end of January, I was now finished with school, but she was not. She moved to live with her older brother, Kenneth, and his wife in an apartment near the campus. So, I no longer had to worry about getting to Minneapolis to see her, and I saw her practically every night from then on, until I went into the service. So I was smitten hard. (both laugh) Then we held fast to the fact that we would not make any formal arrangement until later on.

DePue: To include, saying that you were not engaged at that time?

Yeager: We were not engaged at that time. We did not become engaged until after I had been back and we'd seen each other two or three times, after the war ended.

DePue: Was there any discussion about whether or not each of you would see other people?

Yeager: I mentioned that very early, and in our correspondence, I said to Natalee that I wanted her to be free to see other people. She wrote back and said she did not plan to do so, and, as far as I know, she did not date after that.

DePue: And your options for seeing other people were (laughs) rather limited, while you were in the military, I'm sure.

Yeager: Well, right.

DePue: I want to read one other passage in here, and this is page twenty. This is relatively early in the relationship, but I want to get just some more thoughts

on what you've written here. "I was well aware of a very wide social gap between us. As Professor Mary Gwen Owen reminded me in speech class, there was still a lot of South Dakota in me. Natalee did not give any hint that she was sensitive to the difference. She would not have known, at the time, that my parents were divorced, that my father had essentially abandoned the family and that my mother had remarried and now had three sons by her second marriage.

"I avoided, when possible, saying that my parents had been divorced. I would say that my mother had remarried and that my father had died in an auto accident when I was about twelve. That was the truth, but not the whole truth, since my mother had divorced my father and had remarried before my father died. In those days, there was some social stigma to divorce, perhaps more in a rural community than among city people." Was that a big concern for you?

Yeager: Yes, it was a real concern. I left out one important meeting with Natalee. I'd met her at the mixer. A few days later, Myles Clark—a year ahead of me—called me and said, "Why don't we go over to Minneapolis and see the Carlander sisters?" This was a Sunday. I could be free that afternoon, and I said, "Sure, let's do that. So let's call them." Well, Myles called the Carlander home, and Beth answered and said, "Well, the folks aren't here, but Natalee and I are here. Why don't you come over?" So Myles Clark and I went over to see the Carlander sisters. He brought along his phonograph and his calypso records, which were a lot of fun, and we had a very nice time with the Carlanders.

But I was impressed by their home. Later, I realized this was pretty typical of a middle-class home, but to me, coming in from the country, so to speak, it looked like a very substantial...Well, it was well-built. I soon learned that they had a very strong family life. So, it just seemed to me there was a real gulf between our experiences and that we just wouldn't match. Later, I guess, maybe I'd become enough socialized that I was bold enough to think, "Well, it's worth a try." (laughs) And fortunately, Natalee was willing to respond.

DePue: That gets us, basically, through your college years. When did you graduate?

Yeager: I finished my college experience in mid-year. I had gone to summer school the summer before. I'd taken forty-one hours in my junior year, knowing that time might be short. So I had enough credits, and I had completed all the requirements for the various courses by the time I had completed one semester of the senior year. So, I finished all the college requirements by the end of January, 1944.

DePue: Was that your decision, or was the Navy impatient for you to finish?

Yeager: The Navy was impatient. They really wanted me to come in the fall, prior to this. But I had accepted a position as the president of the Community Council, which is students, faculty, and staff, who combined to deal with community issues and concerns. It was a major responsibility, and I had accepted it, thinking I would have the semester. Well, I wrote to the Navy and said this is the case. "I would really like to finish out the semester." They agreed to it.

Well, later, Bob Hood—a good friend in the same boat that I was in—decided, "Well, we'd better go. Everybody else is going. We'd better go, too." (laughs) Well, then the Navy didn't want us. They said, "No, we've already filled that position." So, we got to finish the semester. I missed the actual graduation exercise, which was in May. I was a thousand miles away, at the north end of Lake Champlain in Plattsburg, New York, at Navy Midshipmen's School. So, I missed that graduation.

DePue: Okay, just a couple of other questions, then, for today, to finish that up. Did it bother you that you missed the graduation ceremony? Did you regret that?

Yeager: I regretted it, but I was caught up with the Navy at that point and studying very hard. I wondered too, when I got into the Navy, whether I could compete. Well, I didn't know, until the commissioning day when we graduated, that I ranked seven out of more than eighteen hundred. So, I found I could compete there too.

DePue: Well, we'll get into a lot more about that in the next session. But, what did your mother think about you going into the Navy?

Yeager: She was quite willing and favored it. My older brother had already gone into the Army, and she accepted that.

DePue: Was he an officer?

Yeager: He became one. Apparently my mother suggested to him that he apply for Officer Candidate School. So, I think she (laughs) was on the lookout. "What's the best thing for my son?" "Well, he ought to be an officer." He was well-qualified. He spent, I think, about three and a half years of his high school experience in Faith, working in the printing office. He learned to become a linotype operator, and he learned a lot about publishing a newspaper in that process. He took typing and shorthand. He became very good at that, and that stood him in good stead, when he became a newspaper reporter, after the war.

So, he had a lot of qualifications when he went into the service, and he also had a couple of years of college behind him. He went to Officer Candidate School and, because of his fine record there, he was named an aide

to Major General Harry Hazlett, who was the commanding officer of the training school in Georgia, where they prepared the troops for going overseas.

DePue: Well, I know Fort Benning was the head of the infantry school.

Yeager: Okay, well, this man was the commander in charge of that. Anson was his aide, and they made a trip together, with some others, to Europe. I think they saw the Anzio beachhead, when it was still a hot place. Anson had that position for about a year and a half.

DePue: How did Natalee feel about you going into the Navy and about military service in general?

Yeager: She did not object. It was really the expected thing, unless a person had a conscientious objection to war or was headed for the ministry or medical school. Then, military service was the expected and accepted thing.

DePue: Okay.

Yeager: I'm sure that she had some concern about whether I'd ever come back. I did too. That's why I didn't want to have too formal a relationship.

DePue: January of 1944. It's still a very hot war.

Yeager: Oh, yes.

DePue: Well, I think this is a good place for us to finish today, unless you have some final comments to wrap things up.

Yeager: I am finished. (both laugh)

DePue: Thanks very much, Iver.

Yeager: You're very welcome, Mark. I appreciate your courtesy and your helpfulness.

DePue: Well, I look forward to the next session.

(end of interview)

Interview with Iver Yeager

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Interview # 2: July 26, 2012

Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Thursday, July 26, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, the director of oral history with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and I'm here today for my second session in Jacksonville, Illinois, with Iver Yeager. Good morning, Iver.

Yeager: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: We had an excellent conversation last time, and even though I'm putting this in our Veterans Remember series, we hardly mentioned the military at all. It was all about your experiences growing up in western South Dakota and going to school at Macalester College and some very interesting insights in those periods.

Now, what I thought I'd start with here is kind of picking up at a comment that you had made, towards the end of our last interview, where you had signed a petition, but then the war started. You elected not to apply for conscientious-objector status, but there were people that you went to school with there who did. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about what happened to some of those people.

Yeager: Well, one of them, who was a good friend, was named John Moll. He was a very conscientious person, and, as an alternative service, he volunteered to be in an experiment at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. In that experiment, the purpose was to determine how much people could study when

they were deprived of food. John was in this experiment, and he said, "After a bit, all you can think about is food. You can't study anymore." So, he went through quite an ordeal in this experiment. Others had other kinds of service, but that was the kind I knew most intimately, because of my friendship with John Moll.

DePue: When we finished off last time, you had just arrived over in Plattsburg, New York. I think this was March 6, 1944. What I'd like to have you do now is tell us more about the nature of the training there, because that's, as I understand, your real first exposure to being in the Navy.

Yeager: Yes, that was my introduction to the Navy. The first month, I was an apprentice seaman. That's the lowest rank you can possibly have, and that was our boot camp. We learned a lot about Navy language. We became accustomed to the idea of calling a wall a bulkhead. The floor was a deck; ceilings were overheads; doors were hatches, and so on. Stairs were ladders. Anyway, we had to learn a lot about simply how the Navy functioned, its organization, the different branches of the Navy, and so on. That was the first month. For those of us who had not previously been in the Navy, as many had, we had to have our shots. Those always came on Saturday morning, so, if we had a miserable day after the shots, why, that took care of the rest of Saturday and all of Sunday.

The next three months after that, we got down to business about learning about what it meant to be an officer in the Navy. We had several major branches of study, one of which, was navigation, and, closely related to that, seamanship. We had a class on gunnery, where we learned about the different types of big guns and small guns that the Navy used in its ships. And we had some general lectures on naval practices, naval courtesies, how a naval officer is supposed to behave, both when he's on duty and off duty. That took three months.

Our work was very intensive, because we had to fulfill the complete indoctrination program for becoming an officer in the Navy. But, because the Navy did not have enough enlisted men to provide the services that were required and supplied elsewhere for midshipmen by enlisted men, every tenth day we had KP, kitchen police work, in the kitchens of the big base we had. That alternated with general work detail, so every tenth day, we missed classes. But we had to do all the work anyway, and we had very frequent tests. So, it was a very intensive program. We also had quite a bit of PE [Physical Education], much of it in the form of gymnastics in the huge gymnasium.

The base at Plattsburg was a World War I army base. The buildings were well built. Our units of 100 men were quartered in twenty separate buildings, fifty on the first floor, fifty on the second floor. I was in platoon K-2, so I was on the second floor, and there were fifty men in my group. We had twenty-five double-decker bunks in that one room. It was a very intimate kind

of relationship. We saw a great deal of the men in our platoon, because we marched together to meals; we marched together to work detail, and we worked side by side on KP or work details. We also, of course, studied together and went to classes together. So, it was I thought, on the whole, an interesting and well-organized program, but a very, very intensive one.

DePue: A lot of times you hear soldiers talk about their boot-camp experience, and I know this was a little bit different, but did it have some flavor of that? Did instructors get in your face and scream at you and put you in stressful situations?

Yeager: No, we did not have that because, for one thing, I suspect, almost all of us had had some college experience, and, in my case, I had completed college. No, we were treated with, I'd say, respect. There was no doubt who was in charge, but I think there weren't any behavior problems. That kind of a ream-out, that some experienced from a tough old sergeant, just didn't fit.

DePue: When you talked about going to college and your high-school years, you talked about getting an education.

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: For this experience, you used the term "indoctrination." Was it that different?

Yeager: That was the Navy's term, and the word does have, I think, a rather unpleasant connotation of you being schooled in some kind of a partisan or very limited kind of orientation. But, basically, it just meant learning the Navy and what it was all about. So, I didn't have the feeling that we were constrained in any way to have to adopt certain political or religious or even military doctrines. It was a neutral term, as far as I can see.

DePue: So, it sounds more like you were being taught, not just the Navy terminology, but how to conduct yourself as an officer and a gentleman?

Yeager: Very much so. Of course, we had to know a good deal about all of these fields, seamanship and gunnery and navigation, because that's what we would be doing when we got assigned to a ship. The officers were in charge of the ship and had amazing responsibilities. After I had had that four months at Plattsburgh, I went to Hollywood Beach, Florida.

DePue: Well, I had a couple of other questions here—

Yeager: Yes?

DePue: …about Plattsburgh. Did you think your training was effective then?

Yeager: Yes, it was, I think, adequate and effective. But, of course, it could not really simulate actual duty on board a ship.

DePue: Well, that was the big question. Did you have any experience on the water at this time?

Yeager: Just in a whale boat, a heavy, unwieldy kind of (laughs) boat that would be rowed by probably twelve men. We even had races in them, which was (laughs) rather pathetic, but no real sea duty. There simply wasn't accommodation for it. Plattsburgh was on an inland lake and simply no way to have the real sea duty, in our situation. If you're an Annapolis man, you get that, of course, but not in midshipmen school during wartime.

DePue: You know, you grew up in about as dry and dusty (Yeager laughs) a place as a person could imagine. Did you even know how to swim, when you went there?

Yeager: Yes, I learned to swim, finally, in college. During my earlier years, in South Dakota, there really wasn't a good place to swim, except in somebody's dam. And that wasn't a very good place to swim. We did it because it's the only way to cool off on a hot day. But I really didn't master swimming until I got into college, and I had a good coach. I can remember him standing over me and saying, "Relax, Yeager, relax!" (DePue laughs) Every time he told me that, I got a little tighter and would sink a little deeper into the water.

But I passed the fifty-yard test in college, and then, because it wasn't on my Navy record, at Plattsburg, I had to pass the test again. Unfortunately, it was in the YMCA pool. The heating system was broken down, and the temperature was somewhere around, possibly, sixty degrees. The water was cold. So, we had the great motivation to make our two swims around the circumference of this pool, to make fifty yards. But I passed it the first time and was happy to have it behind me. I never had to put that to practice at sea, but it would have been very useful had that been necessary.

DePue: Did you have any idea, at that time, how the Navy would end up using you, what kind of service you would be destined to?

Yeager: During much of our time at Plattsburg, we anticipated that most of the men, if not all of us, would be going to landing craft or covering the major landings, and by that time, it would be in Asia, not in Europe. We were at Plattsburg on June sixth, when D-Day occurred in Europe. So, we knew that they wouldn't need us for that. (laughs) We weren't ready.

But practically the entire class—we graduated over eighteen hundred men out of the two thousand who started----went to landing craft. But I was doing well in my coursework. I really had no idea how I compared with other people, because they had a system of grading on 4.0, and I wasn't used to that. We really had no good way of communicating with a large number of students. They didn't post any honor roll or anything like that.

So, I was pleasantly surprised when I was tapped to take a special test. It was one of the most unusual tests I've had in my life. Simply, the test was a multiple-choice type of test, but it would have a problem like this, "Ship A is on course three-six-zero at fifteen knots. Ship B is off its starboard quarter two miles, heading at three-one-five degrees and at eighteen knots. What would be the relative position of these two ships after one hour?" We'd have three choices. Well, that called for some pretty quick thinking and the ability to understand the relationship of the two ships and their direction and their speed. I did very well on that test, so I was sent, for two months, to tactical radar school at Hollywood Beach, Florida.

DePue: Now, I think you mentioned this our last session, but I understand you ended up seventh in your class.

Yeager: Yes, I was surprised and, of course, happy about that. Out of eighteen hundred-plus men, I ranked number seven. I think the difference between my average and the number one person was something like 0.0003. So, they had to grade pretty finely (laughs) to come out with that kind of a list.

[Yeager added the following paragraph at a later date.] The date for our commissioning was June 27. We were instructed to wear dress whites. That afternoon, we marched, by companies, to assigned seats in an open area. We were congratulated for having completed our course, and we all had our orders for our next duty. The names of the top ten men were read, each man standing as his name was called. I was proud to be seventh. It was announced that all of us were now commissioned as ensigns, officers in the U.S. Naval Reserve. That was our cue to throw out hats in the air, a Navy tradition. We were dispersed. Retrieving our caps, we walked back to our barracks. I finished packing my seabag and caught the bus to the depot for my journey, indirectly, for Florida.

DePue: One other question here, before we move on to the Hollywood…Florida, that is. The Army's version of this would be to call it an officer training program, and oftentimes these people, during World War II especially, were called "ninety-day wonders." That's about the same timeframe that you were there. That emphasizes, sometimes, the tension that exists between reserve officers, like yourself, and the guys who had gone through a naval ROTC program, but especially the Naval Academy graduates. Did you have any sense of that? Was there any tension that sometimes existed with the regular Navy officers you encountered?

Yeager: Well, let me just mention briefly the crew of the *Dyson*. The *Dyson* had 325 men. Twenty-five were officers; three hundred were enlisted men. Among the twenty-five officers, there was the captain, and the captain was almost always an Annapolis man. We didn't have another regular Navy officer on the ship, until, I think it was June of 1945, when the war was almost over. We were all reservists. Now, those who were older when they were tapped, some of them

were lawyers and businessmen. They usually had a different kind of indoctrination program, but not too different from midshipmen school, except they probably had much better quarters and much better food and so on.

So, the Navy was run basically by reservists, and (laughs) maybe it was a wonder that we could do what we did, but we did it. After I'd been on the ship for just a few months, because I was a line officer, I took my turn at being in command of the ship, for usually two, sometimes three watches a day. That meant that I would be up on the bridge, overseeing the helmsman, making sure he stayed on our course, receiving any messages from our sister ships or the fleet, and notifying the captain when we had to make a change of course. The captain would sometimes be out on the bridge with us and sometimes back in his cabin, which was at the back of the bridge, as we called it.

The bridge was really the command center of the ship. So I—out of college a few months and (laughs) with a few months of Navy training—had the responsibility of being in command of the ship, which was a rather awesome experience. We never had any problems from that. My worst, perhaps, was when we had a bad storm, and at night we could not use any lights. At night, when I was in charge—and this happened to others, of course, besides myself—we might receive a command to make a change of course. In order to do that and maintain our position, relative to the guide ship, I'd have to plot a course. We had sheets, about fifteen inches square, which were essentially compasses, and we were always at the center. The guide ship would be located, relative to our position on the chart. Then, using various instruments, we would calculate the new course we had to reach. That would involve determining what course to take to reach that place and what speed to reach it.

Well, in the daytime it was rather simple, but at night it was a problem because, to calculate this, I had to stand at a desk. There was no place to sit. It was a high desk, and in order to see, I'd have to hold the flashlight in my mouth. When the ship was rolling back and forth, I couldn't use my hands to hold on, so I'd have a seaman on each side. The seaman would hold my arm with one hand and reach out and hold a stanchion—a vertical standard or support—and hold me against this desk, while we rocked back and forth, and I had the flashlight in my mouth to calculate the course and speed. Well, those were fairly rare experiences, happily. But we were expected to do a lot, and I think we did it, and I think we as reservists deserved a lot of credit. Well, I won't go into any more of that right now anyway.

DePue: Yeah, we can get into that. But that's fascinating to hear. It just gives a good picture of what it's like to do those very simple tasks in a pretty difficult circumstance. But tell us about what you did down in Hollywood Beach, Florida.

Yeager: Well, it was a special school, in which we learned a great deal about radar. Radar was then still, essentially, secret. Of course, our intelligence people knew that the Germans and Japanese had some form of radar, and the enemy knew we had some radar. Happily, the radar that we developed, with a great deal of help from Great Britain, was better than their radar.

DePue: Better than the Japanese radar?

Yeager: The Japanese or the German. We didn't have any contact with German radar, but the Japanese radar. So, we learned about the capabilities of it and how to use radar in tracking enemy aircraft. There were special formulas, for example, to determine the altitude of a plane that was coming in. We also learned a lot about the capability of the various kinds of weaponry we would have.

We had intensive training in identifying aircraft. We'd be in a darkened room. A screen would show just maybe a couple of seconds of an aircraft, and we had to be able to identify it. First of all, is it friendly or an enemy, and, preferably, which kind of aircraft? Some were very easy to identify, like a P-38, which had twin booms. All the other aircraft had single fuselages. The Mustang P-51 was easy to identify, because of its profile. But we had to learn a lot about the identification of ships and especially aircraft.

We had a lot of drills, simulating wartime attacks. We would use large plotting boards, thin white paper that would be placed over an illuminated board, which had a compass on it, so we could see the compass directions through the paper. We would be given certain problems to work out…Ship A is here. Ship B is there, speeds, and so on. We would have simulated attacks, and we would simulate our response to an attack.

Well, we spent many hours on the top floor of the Hollywood Beach Hotel. They didn't have air conditioning. It got awfully hot on a summer day on the top floor. Couldn't have any windows open. Anyway, we spent a lot of time in simulated drills. Other times, we had a lot of classes in gunnery, identification of ships and, especially, the operation of radar.

Our radar textbooks were kept behind barred doors. We had to go behind these barred doors and do our study there. We couldn't take our books back to our hotel room with us, because that was not allowed. We had to do the study behind locked doors, and we had to be very secret about what we were doing. I couldn't tell my family or Natalee, for example, what we were doing.

The food was bad. (DePue laughs) The management, for whatever reason, was not making use of what I'm sure was its opportunity to draw supplies from the Navy. Our favorite item in the meals we had was sliced bologna. We had it fried. We had it chopped up in salads. We had it every

way that the cook could imagine to have this kind of meat. For a drink, we had water flavored with a little chocolate syrup. The meals, I thought, were pretty poor. They weren't nearly as good as the meals we had at Plattsburg. So, since we were thirty miles from Miami, we sometimes would take the bus to Miami on a weekend (laughs) and get a good meal, for a change, go to a restaurant like the Seven Seas Restaurant in Miami. It was a fast two months that we spent at Hollywood Beach.

DePue: I'm assuming that the radar could pick up both surface ships and aircraft.

Yeager: Yes, there are two separate systems for that, the air-search radar and the surface radar. The surface radar was much more satisfactory, but, of course, the ships didn't move as fast as aircraft. It was much easier to keep track of ships on the radar than it was of aircraft. But we had two different types of radar on our ship, and that was customary.

DePue: Now, you talked about the drills you went through so you could identify an aircraft very quickly and things like that, but you're seeing these things, oftentimes, on a radar screen, I would think. How do you differentiate one blip on a radar screen from another and whether it's a ship or it's an aircraft?

Yeager: Well, ships you'd probably know by its location, that it was not part of your fleet. As for aircraft, our aircraft had what was called a transponder. If it's a friendly aircraft, there would be a signal that would then be picked up by our radar, indicating that this was a friendly aircraft. If it didn't have that transponder, we took it as an enemy. We never had any trouble with that kind of confusion.

DePue: In other words, the pilot makes darn sure that his transponder was working.

Yeager: Exactly. It was very (laughs), very crucial. But, in our situation at Okinawa, for example, which is where we had the most intensive need for this kind of activity, there simply weren't any friendly aircraft, except those that we were directing ourselves, to deal with these enemy planes. Most of the time, the only aircraft in the sky around us would be enemy aircraft.

DePue: Did you get any training in sonar? Did the Navy have sonar at the time?

Yeager: Oh, yes. Yes, my training, specifically at Hollywood Beach, was for Combat Information Center. So, when I was assigned to the *Dyson*, that was my specific assignment, combat information officer. I had charge of a very crowded space, which had radar monitors and sonar monitors. The operators were there, and so I could look from one to the other, without any trouble. We had enlisted men, who were monitoring the systems, the radar and sonar and radio systems. We also had, I think, three different radio speakers in our very limited space, as well as sound-powered telephones for communication with the bridge. But, in that very crowded space, we had about eight men who were either monitoring or reporting what the monitor was reading, so that we knew

the direction of an aircraft or ship that was of interest, and we could keep track of what was going on. Then, it was my function to tell the talker, who was using a sound-powered telephone, what to report to the bridge, to the captain.

DePue: Where did you head, then, after this school?

Yeager: After that school? Well, I had the thirteen days after I finished at Hollywood Beach to see Natalee and to see my family and to get to San Francisco.

DePue: Was this in August of '44?

Yeager: Yes, this was August of '44, about the third week in August. I was finished at Hollywood Beach, so I took the train. It was a two-day trip to Minneapolis. [I] Spent about three days with Natalee's family, took a bus for five hundred miles to get to my family, out in South Dakota, spent about three days there and spent the next three or four days on the train from the Black Hills of South Dakota, where they had some pretty good train service, out across the country to San Francisco.

DePue: Very quickly, I wondered, when you talked before about actually going into the Navy and going into warfare and not knowing what's going to happen, you and Natalee had talked about what the future plans would be, and you kept things pretty well open. Was there any change in that kind of discussion, when you went back on this trip?

Yeager: No, we'd agreed that we'd be good friends, that we'd keep in touch, that we had, you might say, a particular interest in each other, but that we would not have any formal arrangement and certainly no legal arrangement about our relationship. Natalee was willing to accept that. I wrote and said I wanted her to be free to see other people and date other men, but she wrote back and said she did not plan to do that. So, we just left it at that.

The frequency and regularity of her letters was such that I was convinced that she was willing to stay with me for the long run. In some of my letters, I made it clear that I was very definitely interested in a long-term relationship but that any formalization of that relationship would have to wait until after the war ended.

DePue: Those are very precise terms you're using, but I'm wondering if your desire to set the parameters of the relationship in that way was more of a sense of... Well, here's what I want to know, what were your real feelings? Did you want to have this be a permanent relationship? Did you already think that this was the woman you wanted to marry?

Yeager: I definitely thought that, yes. But, I would say in my letters, "You are the kind of (DePue laughs) girl I want to marry." I wouldn't say, "I want to marry you." (laughs) "You're the kind of girl..." So, I tried to make it clear that I did have some (laughs) serious, long-term intentions.

DePue: Well, it sounds like you had that typical Northern-European, South-Dakota stoicism in you at that time.

Yeager: Probably so.

DePue: Then you got to San Francisco after that?

Yeager: Yes, and I had a wonderful two weeks. Every morning, I'd check in at the Navy office to see if they had the transportation to take me to Pearl Harbor. Every morning they'd say, "Come back tomorrow." Well, after two weeks, I and a couple of others—some of whom had been with me at the tactical radar school at Hollywood Beach—found that we were going to go to Hueneme, California, which is just north of Los Angeles. It's a port city, Hueneme, spelled H-u-e-n-a-m-e, I think, something like that. So, we went down there, and they had a Liberty ship, which would take twelve of us officers as passengers, out to Pearl Harbor. So, for eight days we rode on this rather slow, cumbersome freighter. We had nothing to do except eat our meals and sleep and sit around and talk.

DePue: Was it pretty calm seas?

Yeager: The seas were calm. The Pacific was pacific, and we had no storms, no bad problems, no enemy. We always had a lifeboat drill every morning. We had to wear life vests. We didn't like that because laundry was difficult to get done on a ship. These life vests they had for us were old and greasy, and (laughs) they would leave grease marks on our shirts. So, we protested but to no avail. We had to put them on for the drill every morning. We had a number of jeeps. And jeeps, of course, had no top. They were open. So, sometimes, if it wasn't too hot, we would sit in a jeep for a couple of hours and talk.

DePue: They were lashed down on the deck?

Yeager: They were lashed on the deck, yes.

DePue: Well, here's what I'm curious about: You've been in the Navy for something like six months, but it sounds like this was your first real experience on a ship.

Yeager: It was, yes.

DePue: So, the obvious question is, how long did it take you to get your sea legs? Was that a problem for you at all?

Yeager: No.

DePue: I would have been wondering for the entire time I was in training, whether or not I would be the kind of guy who got seasick all the time.

Yeager: Well, I wasn't really concerned about that. I used to like these rides at a county fair or at Belle Fourche Rodeo, where you spin around in a capsule. I went on one of those one time, seven times in a row and didn't have any ill effects from it. So, I was not concerned, and I never got seasick. There wasn't really anything except a very gentle movement of the ship on our way to Pearl Harbor. But, even when we got into stormy weather with the *Dyson*, afterwards, I might feel a little drowsy the first day out, but I never got seasick.

DePue: You'd been seeing some fairly exotic places. You spent some time in Florida when it was not necessarily a vacation spot, because it was so hot, and there wasn't air conditioning. But San Francisco had to be a great place to spend some time, and now you're heading to Hawaii.

Yeager: Well, we really explored San Francisco. We liked to ride the cable cars. We'd ride them to the end, and when the motorman would go to turn the car around at the foot of the hill, we'd get out and help him. We'd take a turn sometimes, operating the big handle and the clutch to connect the cable car to the cable, so it would move. So, we had a great time. We went to Golden Gate Park several times and across the beautiful new bridge at San Francisco Bay. So, we really enjoyed being there.

Every night we'd have a good meal. We often ate at the St. Francis Hotel. It had, we thought, about the best restaurant. But we ate other places too, and in the evening, we'd get together. Several of the men had their wives with them, so there might be ten or twelve of us at dinner at the St. Francis. In those days, you'd get a good dinner for $2.50 or $3.00 at the St. Francis. Now, Navy pay wasn't that great, but it wasn't difficult for us. Of course, we got an allowance from the Navy for meals, when we were not on board a ship or at a station. We had a wonderful time sightseeing and visiting with friends in the evening at the St. Francis or some other place.

We had an adventure one time with a waiter. For some reason, I was usually the treasurer of the group, and it was up to me to decide how much of the bill each man would pay for himself or for himself and his wife, so that we would come out with the right amount of money. Well, after our meal, this waiter handed me a bill, which was extravagant, far more than it should have been. So, I looked at it and discovered that he'd had to write it on two tickets because there were so many of us. He totaled the first page, a full page, added that at the top, added a few more people on the second page, and added the first page again. (laughs) So, for three-fourths of the people, he was billing us twice. I called it to his attention, and he was very angry. I said, "Well, call the head waiter." I explained the problem to the head waiter. He said, "It's very difficult to get waiters these days." (laughs) He said I was right. I had the right amount of money. And that's all we had to pay. But, anyway, that marred an otherwise nice evening. But we had a nice time in San Francisco.

Getting to Pearl Harbor, of course, was exotic, but that was not a good time to be at Pearl Harbor. I had almost two weeks there, waiting for the ship assignment. Again, I'd check in in the morning, no assignment. But some days, they would send me to a special school for a day's work on some aspect of the Navy. I wanted to go to a firing range but never went to a firing range. The result was that I never fired a gun while I was in the Navy.

DePue: Did you have a sidearm that you were supposed to have as an officer?

Yeager: Only when I was communications officer on the *Dyson*. The *Dyson* had an assignment of rifles, which were carefully locked, and the communications officer had a forty-five automatic, which had a cartridge with eight bullets in it. I knew how to load it and how to fire it, but I never fired it. I should have had that kind of experience at Pearl Harbor, but they never had time for me (laughs) or a place for me to get any experience with that.

DePue: What timeframe were you in Pearl Harbor? What month was that?

Yeager: Well, we arrived there in September. Actually, it would have been very early October when we finally got to Pearl Harbor, very early October. I'll mention, with regard to the sidearm, that as I continued on the *Dyson*, my responsibilities increased much faster than my rank did, and while I was still an ensign, I became the communications officer. The communications officer was required, when we were on the ship.

If in a port, I had to go to the command ship to pick up official papers, the codebooks, for example. We had to keep current on the codebooks. So, I always had to be armed when I was in this official capacity of getting official mail. Nobody ever threatened me. (laughs) I never had any possibility of using the sidearm, but I had to wear it.

In port, I would wear it when I went to the command ship. I'd get our boat to take me over to the command ship and pick up the allotment of codebooks and other secret material, which we had to have and take it back to my ship. So, (laughs) it was rather ludicrous that I went through the Navy with a sidearm and never used it, even at practice.

DePue: You never fired even one round?

Yeager: Not even one round.

DePue: How long were you in Pearl? Well, let me ask you this first, what was your impression of Pearl Harbor and Honolulu at that time?

Yeager: It was a very, very busy place. For almost two weeks, I had most of the day free, except for those special days when I'd go to a particular school for one day. I remember walking along on the Navy base, by a building. I came to the corner and came face-to-face with Admiral Nimitz, whom I recognized from

photographs. I remembered to salute, and he returned the salute, but he didn't offer to stop and exchange the time of day. We saluted and went on.

I took advantage of a day to make a trip, by bus, around the island. The first major stop of the bus, after we left Honolulu, was Pali Pass. I was enthralled by the beauty of that beautiful vista, with mountains and greenery and beautiful flowers growing wild all over. It's really quite a thrill to see this beautiful mountain scenery. Well, I continued with the bus, all the way around the island, and at that time, the northern part of the island was essentially unoccupied. There was just open space and beach. I'm sure there were some guards somewhere around, but there wasn't any obvious fortification out there. But that made a very nice daytrip.

I was also to go onboard—well, actually I think we didn't get onboard—but to see the hulk of the *Arizona*, which was still lying in the water, of course. I could see the bullet holes in the buildings, where the airplanes were stationed. They hadn't had time to patch the holes in the outdoor part of the buildings. It was very obviously a time of war.

There was also a Diamond Head peak that was a scenic area. We could see it from Honolulu and make a trip up to that. There was an old, old Congregational church there. The Congregationalists went out to Hawaii in the 1820s, when it was still a kingdom, and they built a stone church out of coral rock. That church building was still there. I went to the museum and saw the symbols of the king and the queen of Hawaii. So, it was an interesting place to be, and we had a pleasant time there.

Those of us who were unmarried were stationed in BOQ, bachelor officers' quarters. We would take our meals with the officers at mess hall at the base. The enlisted men had their own mess halls. We had the officers' mess hall. The food was always very good, plenty of it, very inexpensive.

So, I learned that it's a good thing to be an officer in the Navy. You have a lot of privileges, a lot of opportunities, better quarters, better food, better pay, much more freedom. When not on assigned duty, why, I could roam around, in Pearl Harbor. When we would be in port someplace, depending on what the place was, I could go ashore and do some sightseeing. I'll mention some of that later, when we talk about the Philippines.

DePue: Well, is it time that we can start talking about being assigned to the USS *Dyson*?

Yeager: We'd better get to that. For about ten days, I would check in and find there was no assignment. Finally, I checked in on one morning and was told that I was on the list to be the CIC [Combat Information Center] officer for the USS *Dyson* (DD-572), one of the Fletcher-class destroyers.

DePue: Up to this time, you said, most of the people who graduated with you were going to be going to landing-ship tanks or something like that.

Yeager: Well, the men who graduated at Plattsburg with me, went to landing craft, and very few, if any, of those who were with me at Hollywood Beach went to landing craft.

DePue: Okay.

Yeager: Most of the landing crafts would not have had a special CIC officer. Maybe the big LSTs [Landing Ship, Tanks], but most of them wouldn't have a CIC officer. So, we were destined either to be the CIC officer or an assistant CIC officer on a larger ship.

DePue: What was your preference at the time? What kind of ship did you want to serve on?

Yeager: I asked for a destroyer. I wanted a ship that was (laughs) not too big. I didn't want to be an ensign where there might be a corps of a hundred officers on a ship.

DePue: Like a battleship?

Yeager: Like a battleship or an aircraft carrier. Or more than a hundred officers, in some cases. No, I wanted a fairly good-sized ship, but not too big. I knew that the destroyers had a lot of activity, which is the case. So, we never wanted for lack of interesting and challenging assignments on the ship.

DePue: Was that typical of officers of your generation? Was the destroyer one of the more popular things to serve on?

Yeager: Probably not. It might have been a required duty, but I think it was rather unusual to want to be on a destroyer. After I was onboard, I took a special Navy course on destroyers. I had forty pages of written material I had to prepare, in this course on destroyers. But I was interested in that kind of ship, and I was gratified that I'd been assigned to one and liked the duty I had.

DePue: Was this a brand new ship, or had it been in service for a while?

Yeager: It had been in service a year and a half, and after a few months in the Atlantic Ocean, it was sent to the Pacific. It was made a member of the DesRon [Destroyer Squadron] 23, Division 45. A destroyer squadron had nine ships, so the *Dyson* was one of nine ships in Destroyer Squadron 45. Now, during the first year it was out in the Pacific, it participated in many of the squadron activities. Sometimes two, or up to five or six ships, would be detached for special duty. This was before I boarded the ship. They had a lot of activity around Guadalcanal and in the southwest Pacific, before I joined the ship.

Well, in midsummer of 1944, the ship was sent to San Francisco for R&R, recreation and rehabilitation. Anyway, the officers got a chance…Well, all of the crew had a chance to go home for up to thirty days, and they made a lot of improvements on the ship, including installing a special CIC. They had to convert some other space on the main deck to the CIC headquarters. So, I was the first one to be assigned to the ship, in its new CIC.

U.S.S. Dyson, DD572, a Fletcher-class destroyer launched in April, 1942

The ship, after it had been overhauled in San Francisco, was assigned to have some sea duty. They have always had a trying-out period to make sure everything is working. Then, it was sent out to Pearl Harbor. I joined the ship on October 21, 1944.

DePue: Why did the ship need replacements, at that time?

Yeager: Well, as people gained experience in one ship, they may be ready for a bigger assignment that there's no space on that ship for. So, there's a lot of transferring there.

DePue: So, they hadn't experienced any casualties in the combat they'd seen, at that point?

Yeager: Well, they hadn't. But they hadn't had a CIC officer either.

DePue: Okay.

Yeager: So, I was their first CIC officer. I joined the ship on October twenty-first, and on October twenty-fifth, we set sail for Ulithi, in the southwest Pacific.

Iver Yeager aboard the U.S.S. Dyson, 1945

Ulithi was the base for the Third Fleet. The Third Fleet was under the command of Admiral Halsey. Well, the ship had previously been part of this special squadron, Squadron 46, and that squadron became known as the

"Little Beaver Squadron." Somebody had the idea of asking the cartoonist, who wrote the comic strip *Little Beaver,* to draw one of the little Indians that he portrayed in his comic strip for each of the nine ships. So, our ship had a painting of about four or five feet in height on the front of the ship. Each ship had its own "little beaver." The little beavers were Indians. They were white man's Indians. They were cute, chubby little fellows, shown with a bow and arrow. In port, anybody looking around to see who was there would say, "Well, there's a little beaver ship." If we saw another, then we knew one of our ships, in the squadron, was there with us.

DePue: You mentioned DesRon. I'm looking at the patch here, or the insignia, DesRon 23, the little beavers, and this Indian that you just described.

Yeager: Destroyer Squadron, yes, Destroyer Squadron 23.

DePue: Okay.

Yeager: And DesDiv, we were in DesDiv 46. The squadron had two divisions, 45 and 46, and we were 455. So, we were DesRon 23, Destroyer Squadron 23, and Destroyer Division 45.

DePue: How many ships would be in a division, and how many ships would be in a squadron?

Yeager: Well, the squadron had nine, and since there were nine ships, you'd have (laughs) either five or four in a division.

DePue: Were they all destroyers?

Yeager: All destroyers, all the same class.

DePue: But once you actually sailed from Pearl Harbor, are you then part of a fleet, or are you operating somewhat independently or operating as a squadron? How did that work?

Yeager: Well, at that point, we were operating independently. So, by ourselves, we set out for the long trip to Ulithi.

DePue: I've got to tell you here, I hadn't heard of Ulithi before. So, I jumped on the Internet, and it came up. It's certainly there, and there was a map. The map was nothing but solid blue. (Yeager laughs) There wasn't even a dot on the map to show that there was some kind of an island there. And it looked to me like this was smack dab in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Yeager: Well, not the middle, way down in the southwestern part. It was an atoll. It was a submerged volcano. What often happens, in a case like that, is that coral building around the fringes of a submerged volcano will eventually accumulate enough space at the top to have a little island. So, the Ulithi atoll

was a roughly circular group of small uninhabited islands. The one nearest to where we usually anchored had maybe one or two palm trees on it (laughs) and a nice sandy beach. It was an uninhabited atoll, but far enough away from the Japanese so that we were safe.

DePue: Do you know where the name came from?

Yeager: Where what?

DePue: The name Ulithi?

Yeager: No, I don't.

DePue: Do you know if this island was claimed by any country?

Yeager: I don't know that it was. Of course, the U.S. commandeered it. I don't think we had to take it from anybody.

DePue: Well, again, I'm looking at a picture of Ulithi, and boy, there's not much. (laughs) This is not a big island. It looks like it's about big enough for an airstrip, and that's it.

Yeager: Well, it was a group of islands—

DePue: Okay.

Yeager: …sort of circular in shape, and most of them were quite small. I would think the one we often sent beach parties to was possibly a couple of hundred feet long and maybe seventy-five or a hundred feet wide. Probably, the top of it was not more than ten feet, if that much, above sea level. So, it wasn't much. But it was solid ground, and we would send a beach party.

The ship carried beer, but it was never served on the ship. When we had a beach party, each enlisted man was allowed two bottles of beer. But I didn't drink beer, so I would give mine to some of the men. But it was my duty, one day, to take men from my division on a beach party to the beach. The weather was warm; in fact, it was hot. And they hadn't been used to beer. So, two bottles, and maybe sometimes they had three. If you got one from somebody else or from me, they might have had three and maybe even four bottles of beer. They would get quite drunk.

On the way back to the ship, one time, I had a problem with two of the men who were ordinarily very good friends, but they got into some kind of a quarrel. They were really (laughs) ready to tear each other apart. Well, I made the mistake of putting them in opposite corners of the LCVP—that's landing craft for vehicles and personnel—that would hold maybe forty or fifty men, if they were crowded in. The front of it would open up, so that you could beach it, and men could walk ashore. But, the mistake was not in putting them in

different corners but in putting them in opposite corners. So, one was at the forward corner, and one in the rear corner. So, I couldn't see them both at the same time.

If I'd put them both in the back, at different corners, or in the front, in different corners, I would have been all right. But, if I was watching one of them, the other would be making faces and shaking his fist. If I'd turn around and glare at him, (laughs) the other fellow would do it. So, all the way back to the ship, we had a problem. The next day, these men came around and apologized. (laughs) They never really got into a fight, but they really were eager for one.

DePue: Were you happy to get the assignment that you did on the USS *Dyson*?

Yeager: Yes, I really was pleased to be assigned to a destroyer, and I think I was fortunate to get that particular ship. There were problems with the captain, but we had a very, very good executive officer, who had already been at sea for four years. He was a civilian. He was not an Annapolis man. He was a reservist. John Carter was the executive officer, and he really managed the ship. He, of course, reported to the captain. The captain gave the fundamental orders, but John was the executive who really carried out the orders, and he was a very fine person to work with.

DePue: What was the problem with the captain?

Yeager: Well, the captain was an old Annapolis man, who had been in the Navy for twenty years but had never had a command. He was a staff communications officer for most of his career, but in order to advance to the rank of captain, which in the Navy, is a high rank, like colonel, he had to have a command. So, he learned how to command a ship, aboard the *Dyson*. He'd already had about two weeks of it when the ship went from San Francisco out to Pearl Harbor. But he still, really, was green at it. If we had to tie up alongside another ship, either in a port or at an anchorage, it was always nip and tuck as to whether we'd ram the other ship. Twice, we poked holes in other ships' (laughs) bows with our anchor, because the captain didn't know quite how to handle the ship.

So, the captain had to prove himself, and I think that was a part of the problem. He was uneasy, and he knew that we knew that he was (laughs) uneasy and not really skillful at handling things. And he was cantankerous at times. One time, for example, our mess boys were serving pie. They made wonderful pies. We had two mess boys, who served us officers, in the wardroom, and took care of our staterooms and handled our laundry and prepared our meals. They made wonderful pies. Well, we had to have a pie one day.

When we were in port or tied up in an anchorage, the captain would have his meals in the wardroom, with the officers. Otherwise, he had his own stateroom, up on the bridge level. Well, the wardroom mess boy would always serve the captain first, and they placed a nice piece of apple pie in front of the captain. He looked at it and said, "Why don't we ever have cheese on our apple pie?" Well, we didn't have any cheese.

We had a relatively new officer, who was elected wardroom treasurer, so he had the task of getting cheese. The next time we were in an anchorage, he sent signals around, "Will trade five gallons of red lead paint for five pounds of cheese." Well, pretty soon, he had an offer, so we had cheese.

The next time we had apple pie, there was a slice of cheese on the captain's apple pie. The captain looked at it and said, "Who put cheese on my apple pie? You know I don't like cheese on apple pie." We were stunned. (laughs) We couldn't say anything. You can't talk back to a captain. You can't say, "Captain, you said you wanted cheese. Now you don't want it?" Well, the mess-room treasurer was (laughs) mortified, and we were too. Now, we had another experience similar to that, but with chocolate sauce on our ice cream.

So, he was not an easy man to get along with. It was particularly difficult for me, because I was, at first, the assistant and then, the communications officer. CIC was part of the C Division, meaning communication. It had radio, radar, sonar and yeoman. Yeomen are clerks essentially, typists, radio men. It was a big division of about sixty men, and so I was functioning, in time, as communications officer. But that was the special field of the captain. So, I felt I was always due for special attention. I had to be especially careful with the captain.

One time, I got a call over the PA [Public Address] system, "Mr. Yeager, lay up to the bridge." Well, I was close by, so it didn't take me long to get up to the bridge. That meant I had to see the captain. I got there in time to hear the captain bawl out this seaman for using the wrong language. You don't tell an officer to lay up to the bridge. Officers were always addressed as mister. We didn't use ranks on the ship, fortunately. That would have been very confusing. Every officer, except the captain, was addressed as mister. The captain was always the captain. The captain was telling the poor seaman, who was new on the ship and didn't know naval courtesy, "You say, 'Mr. Yeager, report to the bridge.' You don't say, 'Mr. Yeager, lay up to the bridge.'"

Well, I knew the captain's ire was up, and the captain wanted to know, "Why wasn't I informed that the TBS [Talk Between Ships] is out?" The TBS was our major fleet radio. It was used only by the admiral of the fleet to communicate with all the ships, the battleships, carriers, cruisers, destroyers, DEs, whatever else. It was the major fleet radio, so, obviously, very, very

important. I said, "Captain, there is nothing wrong with the TBS. I have just talked to Beers." He was our chief electronics mate and a very, very good one, fortunately. I had just talked to Beers. "He assures me that the TBS is fine. There is a problem with the TDY [a type of radar jammer]."

Mounted on the stern of the ship, we had an experimental radar, called TDY, and we were told not to use it, until instructed to do so. We were never instructed to do so. But Beers, nevertheless, kept it in good shape, found a problem with it, and put it on his report to me. My function, as communications officer, was to take the messages, which we had received during that twenty-four hours. Some of them came by radio code—the most important ones--and some of them by other codes.

Once in a while, there were just plain messages and items of information that the captain needed to know. Well, these were all collected and put on a clipboard, which I would take to the captain first. He would look at it, read all the messages and initial the cover memorandum. Then, I'd take it to certain other officers, the executive officer, of course; usually the navigator, depending on the messages; sometimes the ship's doctor. But, in each case, I'd have to get the person's signature.

So, anyway, to return to my conversation with the captain, I said, "There is a problem with the TDY, and somebody has apparently heard the story that there's something wrong with it, but was misinformed or added the misinformation that it was the TBS. The TBS is fine. The TDY is not working properly. This was on the message board two days ago, and you signed for it." He acknowledged. He says, "I remember. I read it. I signed for it." He apologized, (laughs) which was unusual. He was mollified, calmed down a good deal, after I explained to him that it was the TDY.

But that's the kind of situation that you don't really appreciate. Did you ever see the play *Mr. Roberts*?

DePue: I've seen that. Yes, I have.

Yeager: Do you remember the officer in that, the commander?

DePue: Well, I think it was Jimmy Cagney.

Yeager: I think so. Well, if you've seen that play, you know that commanding officers can be mean, difficult to deal with, and ours was, much of the time.

DePue: Well, having not spent time in the Navy, but having read some about it, my understanding is that the captain of the ship has a very different kind of role than a commander in a ground unit would have.

Yeager: Oh, yes.

DePue: He has a lot more autonomy, because you're out there all by yourself.

Yeager: Well, he's an absolute authority. We heard from a sister ship, some of the senior officers had to restrain the captain to keep him from shooting one of the crewmen, who had angered the captain for something. Now the captain is the authority, and you have no appeal. You can't say, "I quit," (laughs) and walk off the job and get another job. You can't do that.

Now let me add something more about—

DePue: Sure.

Yeager: …the captain. There were other times when the captain and I might have a discussion on the bridge, when we had a very routine patrolling situation, and we had very little to do. We'd be on the bridge, and we could carry on a conversation, maybe for a couple of hours, about books we'd both read and about other things. So, there were many times when he was a gentleman and a decent person, and we could talk, really, man to man. But we always had to be on guard for these difficult situations.

DePue: While you were actually shipping west, from Pearl Harbor, was that the timeframe that the battle of Leyte Gulf was going on?

Yeager: It was the very day of that battle, yes. We didn't know about it, until the next day, but every day we received messages from Washington, D.C., in code form. The fleet had very fine coding machines. I don't know whether you're familiar with them, but they looked like an oversized typewriter. They had twelve reels, which could be fitted in different positions, six in this row; six in the back row. They had every letter and numeral that we would use on the left side and on the right side of that disc, which was about five inches across and about half an inch thick. You could turn the disc either right or left. There was a marker at the top on the machine. You could start it with the A one day and with the Z another day and with something else the third day. So, it had a great number of different combinations, and since they could be in different orders, you really had to have one of the machines set exactly to the same readings, in order to read the message.

So, one of my jobs, during the day, was to go to the coding shack, with the messages from the radio men. I'd look up in the coding book and find out what the message was. Well, the message would have a message in Greenwich Time. We always used Greenwich Time. It would say that, for this day, for twenty-four hours Greenwich Time, you use this kind of setting for the machine. The next day, it would be different. I'd have to make sure that I had the coding machine set up for that day's messages, and then I would type the crazy symbols—letters and whatever else, in the message—exactly as they were on the message. But it would come out then in English, with the message

that was wanted. So it was a very fine machine, a very good one, very closely guarded.

The instructions were that, if you're going to abandon the ship, you must weight the box, that has these discs in it, and drop it overboard. (laughs) You had to weight it. That was a problem, but we never had to do that. That was one of the interesting things on the ship, running the coding machine and finding out what was going on. So, I knew before anybody else on the ship what an order might be for us or for the fleet.

DePue: Would that be where you would get information, like a major battle, such as the battle at Leyte Gulf?

Yeager: That would be one way. There would be some report, but most of that news, we would get by shortwave radio, not coded. It would be the general news that the public would get.

DePue: Well, one reason, as I understand at least, that that was a significant battle was that this was the first place that the kamikaze tactics were being used.

Yeager: They started using them, I think, on that very day. How significant they were, I don't know. What I read about the battle doesn't mention the kamikazes in that connection, but that was the day, I think, they were authorized for first use.

There is a very interesting book. I think it's called *Thunder at Sea*, with a subtitle *Four Commanders and the Last Great Naval Battle*. The book goes into considerable detail about four commanders—two Japanese and two American commanders—who were related to the action at the battle of Leyte Gulf. The two American commanders were Admiral Halsey, in charge of the Third Fleet, and (laughs) Halsey wasn't there for that great big battle. He was just itching to have a great battle with the Japanese fleet.

The Japanese were smart. They had a guidebook on how to fool the Americans, so to speak. It had been captured and translated, so people in our Navy knew that one of the tactics that the Japanese had was to lure somebody by having an aircraft carrier go off in a certain direction.

Well, at Leyte Gulf, Admiral Halsey was informed that there was an aircraft carrier heading north on the east side of the Philippines, Leyte. He said, "That's it. We'll follow it. We'll catch up with the fleet and have a big battle." His men, who were on his team, said, "Captain, this is one of the plans the Japanese have to fool us." Halsey wouldn't hear of it.

He started, under steam at eighteen knots, to catch up with this ship, and he took practically the entire fleet with him. He'd been told that, if he thought there was going to be a big battle, he could take most of the fleet, but he was to leave some ships behind. But there was a loophole. If he thought

this was really going to be a big battle, he could take virtually everything with him, and he did. He left (laughs) Leyte Gulf virtually unprotected.

DePue: Was that during the time the Army was making landings there? I think it was.

Yeager: Well, it would have been about the same time. We'd been bombarding. Our first duty, with the Third Fleet out of Ulithi, was to provide cover for the aircraft carriers, while they were bombing the installations on Leyte.

The practice was that, before dawn, the fleet would move close enough to Leyte so that the planes from the carrier would make a bombing run to Leyte and have enough fuel to get back to the aircraft carrier. Well, as soon as the planes were launched, the fleet would back off and get out of range of the land planes the Japanese had at Leyte. Then, when it was time to pick up the planes, we'd move back in to the approximate location where they'd been launched. So, this was a rhythm every day to cover the bombings.

Well, Halsey was lured away and took the fleet with him. He left a few ships back there. One of them was a destroyer called the *Johnson*. The *Johnson* was commanded by a Navy officer, who was, I believe, a Cherokee Indian, which was unusual. He'd gone through Annapolis, and apparently he'd graduated, maybe in the very early '20s.

The '20s were very difficult years for the Navy. There were great restrictions on how many ships the Navy could have. It meant that people were officers that didn't move up very fast, because there wasn't any activity. This man graduated from Annapolis and was assigned to a tugboat. Well, he was operating, I think, in San Francisco, and they needed pilots to guide big ships, like aircraft carriers, into the harbor.

So, although he was an officer in the Navy, this man acted as a civilian pilot for big ships, including aircraft carriers, in his free time. When he was a pilot, he did not wear any Navy insignia. He just wore dungarees. And at night, he would put on his uniform and go to the officers' club. He said people would be looking at him, trying to figure out, "Where have we seen that man before?" They could never figure out that he was the man who was the pilot, who had guided their ship in.

Well, later, he was the commander of this destroyer at Leyte, and he told the men, "I'm going to fight. If you want to get off, you can get off. (laughs) But I'm going to fight." And he did. He launched a furious campaign against the Japanese fleet, which had already defeated whatever American ships there were, or most of them. But he launched this campaign. He laid smokescreens to confuse the Japanese.

Finally, his ship was sunk, and as the Japanese commander of the Japanese fleet came by, he had a hundred men in dress uniforms stand at attention alongside his ship. When they passed the point, where the ship had

sunk—Obviously, the destroyer had sunk; they could tell from the oil spill—he saluted. The men in the water thought they were going to be shot. They weren't shot. This Japanese commander did not believe in taking life unnecessarily.

Now, he was one of the commanders, then, who was discussed in considerable detail in the book. He was the winner of that battle at Leyte Gulf. Halsey was…well, he was the loser, because he wasn't there. The other Japanese commander, who was mentioned in this book, was the one who took the great battleship the Japanese had…Well, they had two of them, but they had eighteen-inch guns, larger than were allowed in those days. An enormous battleship tried to make a last stand against the Americans, and the result was that his ship was sunk by our planes, with about four or five thousand men onboard.

DePue: Was that the *Yamato*?

Yeager: I think that was his name.

DePue: I mean the battleship's name?

Yeager: Yes. It's a fascinating book about the four commanders and the last great naval battle. The last one, because they don't have ships like that anymore. There won't be great fleets like that anymore. But it's a fascinating account.

DePue: Do you recall your reaction and the reaction of other people you were serving with, when you heard about these kamikaze attacks?

Yeager: Yes, we were worried. We were very worried. We were told that Okinawa is the graveyard for destroyers, and we did not rate a chaplain. We were too small for a chaplain. But, if we were in port on Sunday, we would have church call and send a boat to a carrier or a cruiser or some other large ship that had a chaplain that had services. We would send men for the Catholic service. We would send men for the Protestant service. Well, we would always have a few men who would go. I almost always went. If I were not on watch duty, I would go to church on Sunday, if I could. But usually, it was a relatively small handful of people who went. The Sunday after we learned we were going to Okinawa, the church call brought a lot of men out. They were worried. Well, we had reason to be.

We went to Okinawa. I should mention first how we got there. We were gathered in a large fleet, in the vicinity of Subic Bay, in the Philippines. Subic Bay is on the west side of the big island and had a port, of sorts. We gathered, as a fleet, went up the west side of the island, and came to Lingayen Gulf. The admiral of the fleet said, "This is deemed a safe area. You can have lights at night. You can show movies."

Well, we were tied up alongside another destroyer, and in those days, if you had two ships together, you could rig a screen between the two ships, so that you'd put reels one, three, five, seven, *et cetera*, on one ship; two, four, six, eight on the other ship. That way you didn't have to change reels during a movie. So, it made it much nicer. Part way into the movie, we'd heard explosions on shore. We could see explosions on the shore, and all night long, the ammunition dump exploded. A small Japanese plane had flown in, dumped a stick of bombs on a huge ammunition dump, and the whole dump apparently went up.

All night long there were explosions. There'd be great flares in the air, illuminating the scene. It obviously was (laughs) not a safe area for the munitions dump. We never had any attack, ourselves, nor did any ship. Then we finally got to Okinawa, and then two ships would be assigned to certain locations to try to be screens for intercepting incoming planes.

The Japanese kamikazes really wanted the big ships. They wanted to hit, preferably, carriers but also other large ships. But destroyers would do, especially if they were going to attack kamikaze. So, we were assigned to spend three days on a given station, with another ship, and we would hear, over the radio, about attacks that other ships were receiving. We would go out on a three-day mission and not see or hear a single kamikaze. We would be replaced by a ship, which would get hit by a kamikaze. Other times, we would go out to replace a kamikaze victim, but we were never hit. We had to shoot down a number of kamikazes, but we were never attacked.

DePue: Were they heading towards your ship? The ones you shot down?

Yeager: Yes. Oh, yes. And that was very difficult, because a plane heading towards you makes a very small target. We used shells, which would explode if within, say, fifty feet of a target. So, you didn't really have to hit the target directly, which was very difficult. If you got pretty close to it, you might bring down the plane. But we used a lot of ammunition that way, and we were never hit ourselves.

DePue: I don't think we mentioned it. Can you describe the *Dyson* for us and include things like the armament that it had and the crew size?

Yeager: (laughs) Well, there were 325 on the ship, the captain, approximately twenty-five officers, and approximately three hundred enlisted men. The ship was armed with five, five-inch, 38-caliber guns. They were basically antiaircraft guns that could fire about two rounds a minute. And there were five of these guns, two forward, two at mid-ship, and one on the stern. So, we could shoot in any direction, and if we were shooting broadside, we could fire all the five guns. But those were our main defense, the five, five-inch, thirty-eight caliber guns.

The shells for them were, first of all, a power cartridge that was about three feet long and five inches in diameter. The shell itself would be about eighteen inches long and five inches in diameter. They were stowed below decks, underneath the guns in each turret. Enlisted men would load a shell and a cartridge on an elevator carrier, which would bring it up to the gun, so the men at the gun could load the weapon. So, first they put in the shell and then the power cartridge. Then they'd close the breech and fire the gun. This could be done as much as two every minute. That was our main defense.

But we also had two quad mounts, 40-millimeter Swedish Bofors guns. They had 50-caliber shells. They could fire very rapidly. They used a clip of, I think, 5.50-caliber shells, and they were very effective and easy to aim and manage. They could be aimed, basically, by sight. The big guns were usually controlled by radar; although, as they were coming in, the gunnery officer could override the system, if he thought he could get a better shot at an incoming plane. We had 50-caliber, mounted machine guns and 30-caliber machine guns, several of those.

We also had ten torpedoes, which were housed at mid-ship, on a deckhouse, about six feet above the deck, where these ten torpedoes could be fired, from one side or the other side, one at a time or more than one at a time. Finally, we had "ash cans" they were called, small barrels, mounted on a Y configuration. They were placed so that the stem of the mount, with the barrel, would slide into a gun mount. They could be fired and shot to one side or the other side of the ship, in an effort to attack a submarine. They could be set for the expected depth of the submarine.

One of the things that sonar could tell was the approximate depth of the submarine, as well as its location. So, when you had that information and you thought you were, more or less, over a submarine, you could launch these ash cans.

So really, for a very small vessel, we had an immense amount of armament. The ship was really designed for death and destruction, maximum death, maximum destruction for any enemy.

DePue: Now, you've already said that you can account for several kamikaze attacks, where you were downing the aircraft before they got close to you. Where there any surface ships or submarines that the ship could take credit for, as well?

Yeager: Well, we never had any surface attacks, while I was on the ship. They did before I joined the ship, yes, but not afterwards. The Japanese fleet had been pretty well (laughs) destroyed by that time.

We had one submarine sighting. We were cruising along in Leyte Gulf, coming back from a mission with another ship, and suddenly our

lookout spotted a submarine, which was maybe just a couple of miles away. They could see the conning tower very plainly. There was a nice, beautiful moon that night, and the submarine was essentially silhouetted against the moon. Well, by that time, we were maybe less than a mile from the sub, and the captain was cautious. The navigator said, "The chart says that there will be no American submarines in this area. That's what the chart says."

Now, the captain wanted to be very sure, so he instructed the signalman to send a message. We had powerful lamps mounted on the bridge, which would be aimed. They were equipped with louvered shutters, so that a signalman could send a Morse code message with them. The captain said, "Ask him for his ID; ask for his identification." So, there's a standard international message, "Report your ID." The captain would rather, obviously, miss a Japanese sub. He'd rather miss a Japanese sub than risk sinking an American sub.

Well, there was no response from the submarine (laughs) to the message, and by that time, they were almost altogether underwater. My belief is that the submarine sighted us first and that they were already starting to make their descent, before we spotted them. By the time the captain sent the message, they were (laughs) far enough away and far enough down that they could simply keep on going and disappeared under the surface.

Our sonar picked up the location, but it was a very poor signal. Our sonar man stayed with it, and we tracked them, maybe for a few hundred yards, but then lost all contact. We did launch some ash cans, but there was no debris that came to the surface. Apparently, the submarine, which must have been a Japanese submarine, got away. So, that was our only contact with a submarine.

DePue: How fast was your ship?

Yeager: Very fast. The ship had sixty thousand horsepower.

DePue: Whoa.

Yeager: For a twenty-one-hundred-ton ship. That's more horsepower than (laughs) any battleship had before World War II. It had very great power. We had four boilers and two engines, two turbines which rotated the screws. We had twin screws. They were about twelve feet across. With that much horsepower, we could make 395 turns. Ten turns equaled about one knot. A knot is a nautical mile in length. A nautical mile is two thousand yards or six thousand feet. So, it's better than a land mile. With 395 turns, we were making approximately forty knots, with forty knots equivalent, roughly, to forty-five miles an hour on land.

The only time we really got up to that speed was the day that we were coming into Point Bolo at Okinawa, after being on a mission for three days,

with no activity. We hadn't yet reached our berth assignment, so we were still underway, still had the boilers on. We got orders to proceed to the other side of Okinawa to help rescue the *Braine*, one of the ships in our squadron. We operated separately, but they were on the other side of the island, and they'd been hit by a kamikaze.

In order to get there, we had to go from Point Bolo, which was roughly midway from north to south on the west side of Okinawa. We had to go down to the southern tip and around the tip, to a point more or less south of the Bolo, on the other side. So, I would suppose it was maybe fifty miles that we had to travel. Well, the captain ordered flank speed, all-out speed.

The sea was perfectly calm, absolutely calm, and so we had no trouble with it. We were to be accompanied by one of the new two-thousand-ton destroyers. They couldn't keep up with us. We were making forty knots, and we really traveled to get to the *Braine*. By the time we reached the *Braine*, other ships had rescued the most severely wounded and removed the dead.

We did bring back some of the men, who were less severely wounded from the *Braine* to a hospital ship at Point Bolo. But that was the only time we ever really used that all-out speed. So, for its size, the ship had enormous power.

DePue: Was that class of ships the fastest thing in the water at the time?

Yeager: I think it was, except for the torpedo boats, which could go even faster. But they were small craft. They couldn't handle a rough sea.

DePue: Well, we talked a little bit about what was going on in Okinawa. I want to take you back a few months, back to the timeframe when you're operating around the Philippine islands. I think that's around the December timeframe, wasn't it?

Yeager: Yes, the December timeframe. It occurred on December eighteenth.

DePue: What occurred on December eighteenth?

Yeager: Well, we were a messenger ship, the day before the typhoon broke. One reason for having the speed that a destroyer had was because, if you're serving a fleet, which is maybe ten miles across and maybe moving at twenty knots, you have to go much faster than that to get from one side of the fleet to the other. So, that's one reason for the need for speed. Well, we had used up a lot of fuel. In fact, when we operated with the carriers, we had to refuel from a larger ship every three days, to keep our tanks ready. Because we had been the messenger ship, we were allowed to refuel the night before the storm broke. That's what saved us.

The storm broke the next day, and the typhoon was a very big one. I estimated the height of waves as sixty feet, but I read other reports that said they were probably seventy feet high. That's (laughs) a pretty rough sea. We were ordered to steam at five knots. We weren't going to go anywhere, really, against the wind and the storm. But, with five knots, you have steerage way with the rudder. You have to be able to point the ship into the storm to keep from turning side-wise, where you'd be rolled over and capsized.

So, because we had fuel, we were able to ride out the storm. Well, during the storm, we lost contact with the *Spence*, one of the other ships, and there were a lot of close personal ties between the personnel on the two ships that dated back before I came on the ship. At any rate, there was no contact with the *Spence*, and the radiomen would say, "Well, they probably lost their antenna during the storm." Three days after the storm was over, we got the report that survivors of the *Spence* had been found sixty miles away, clinging to life rafts. About twenty-three men survived, out of the more than three hundred.

Three destroyers were capsized in that storm, the *Spence*, the *Hull*, and the *Monaghan*. One of those who survived was an officer, who wrote a report afterwards about how the storm broke, that was published in the *Dyson* book. They ran out of fuel, and without fuel, they couldn't keep steerage way, and the ship was capsized. It went down with most of its crew. Most of the men were below decks, because there's no place to be on deck, unless you were on the bridge. You'd get washed overboard. So, the only safe place on the ship is below decks, and, of course, that means death, if a ship capsizes. That was a pretty bad storm.

DePue: From what you described, it was very difficult for your ship to survive it as well. What kind of roll and pitch would you have in a storm like that?

Yeager: Well, we did a lot of pitching. Pitching is movement fore to aft, up and down. Rolling is sideways. There wasn't any good measurement for pitch, but, on the mast of the ship, where it went through the bridge, was a very simple device, a heavy iron arrow, which was suspended from a bolt. It was able to swing from side to side. So, when you took a roll, it would show how far we rolled.

The biggest roll I ever saw was fifty-three degrees, and ordinarily that would mean the ship would capsize. We had a very good engineering crew. They had known how to ballast the ship before the storm. If you don't have proper ballast, it's very hard to keep a ship afloat in a bad storm. But they did.

DePue: Can you describe what that would mean to a layman, when you ballast correctly before the storm?

Yeager: Well, you have a lot of tanks at the bottom of the ship, and they can be used for either fuel or water. As you use up fuel in a tank, you should fill it with water, so you have that weight. If you don't have enough liquid in the tank, whether it's fuel or water, the liquid will surge from one side to the other. As the ship rolls back and forth, that movement of the liquid below and the weight that it has will vary. If it's going the opposite direction of the roll, that's all right. But if the liquid is going to the same side, towards which you're rolling, it means you'll probably capsize. You'll roll over.

So, you have to have the proper ballast in the bottom of the ship from fuel or water or a combination in different tanks in order to keep the bottom of the ship weighted enough to hold the upper part of the ship upright.

DePue: Well, this is just a few days before Christmas that this happened.

The USS Dyson on a calm sea, mid-1940s

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: Where was the ship during Christmas?

Yeager: We were at Ulithi, the nice calm weather, nice warm day. We had the wardroom door open, while we were anchored at Ulithi. We played Bing Crosby, singing "White Christmas." It didn't really look like Christmas, looking at a little palm tree on a sandy beach, maybe a hundred yards from you. But we had a fine dinner, a special dinner.

The Navy had good food and served it well. All of the crew had good food. We in the officers' mess, had our own mess treasurer. We could have some choices to what we wanted, and we paid for it, but not very much, about twenty dollars a month. We enjoyed the food, and we had fine men, two black men—Negroes, we called them—who waited on us. They were illiterate.

Sometimes I'd be asked to write a letter for one of them, so he could write to his wife.

DePue: What I'd like to do here is to read a letter to Natalee, I guess, dated December 23, 1944. It's going to paint a wonderful picture of what was going on in your mind and in your experiences. It starts off this way, "Darling, surely this is the strangest Christmas Eve I have ever spent. The air is warm, and the half moon is hanging overhead, midst the downy clouds. There's none of the usual preparation, no shopping, no street decorations, no Santa Clauses jingling their bells on the corner of the sidewalk. More important, there is little opportunity for any religious commemoration of Christmas, and that is the worst part of it. Not only that, but I did something I had never thought I'd do on Christmas Eve. I went to a show. It was a light musical. There wasn't much to do, except for a nice arrangement of "All or Nothing At All," sung by a Negro quartet. Yet, it did not seem sacrilegious, as I know it would have been back there.

"This is a strange Christmas Eve, and yet I feel the same peace within me that I have felt in other years in other places. It is hard to explain how one can attain a degree of happiness here and peace of mind and hope and pray for a great peace to reign throughout the world. Yet, it is possible. I suppose it's trying to be content with the good things, and there are many things to be thankful for of the present, while always there is the thought of a brighter, far happier future.

"Finally, I am grateful that I can spend this time and tomorrow in quietness. Many others will have a sad Christmas this year. I'm going to close now. For almost as long as I can remember, since I was about ten years old, I read the Christmas story from Luke [one of the four New Testament gospels.] and then have spent some time in prayer and meditation. I want to continue this little custom of Christmas Eve. I believe this is the one time of the year, if never at any other time, when a man should erase from his mind all the grudges and dislikes and petty annoyances and resolve anew to make this birthdate a time of rebirth of his own soul. With all my love to you, darling, Iver."

That's quite a letter.

Yeager: It brings back memories. I couldn't really tell Natalee what I was doing on the ship or what the ship was doing. We were forbidden to make any specific reference to any place or activity. The only way that she could judge where I was was when I reported to her that I had lunch with Commander Harold Stassen, on board the battleship *New Jersey*.

At Macalester College, Governor Harold Stassen had given the commencement address and was given an honorarium of $100. That doesn't sound like much in today's figures, but it was 20% of the cost of a year of

college. Board, room and tuition amounted to $500 a year. So, when he returned that honorarium to the college and asked that it be awarded to a worthy student, it happened that I was chosen for it.

By that time, I knew that he was going to be in the Navy, and I was going to be in the Navy. I wrote to him, thanking him for the award and mentioning our common Navy experience. He wrote back a nice note and suggested that, "If we're ever in the same port, let me know." Well, I knew that he was on the staff of Admiral Halsey, and Admiral Halsey was on the *New Jersey,* which was the command ship for our fleet at Ulithi.

So, with the executive officer's permission, I sent a signal, by the signalman, to the *New Jersey,* identifying myself as formerly a student at Macalester College, and I had this message delivered to Commander Stassen. Pretty soon, I had an answer: "Come over for lunch." So, again, with permission from the exec, I had the coxswain take me in the ship's boat to the *New Jersey*.

When I got to the ship, I saluted the officer at the deck and said, "Ensign Yeager, reporting to Commander Stassen," and an aide took me up to the admiral's headquarters on the main deck. Well, Commander Stassen said he was on CIC [Combat Information Center] watch, but he would soon be through with that, and we would have lunch together. So, I had about fifteen or twenty minutes in a nice waiting room.

He and I were the only officers at the large, circular table, where Admiral Halsey's staff ate. They had all had lunch earlier, and so it was only Commander Stassen and I. But we were nicely served, with a nice luncheon, by a Filipino waiter. We had the admiral's own dinner plates and admiral's silver to eat with. It was a very pleasant occasion.

We, of course, didn't talk business. We talked about Minnesota. We talked about Macalester. We talked about our families. About twenty minutes after we finished lunch, I said, "Please send a message to my ship for them to come and get me." He said, "That won't be necessary. I'll send you in one of our boats." Well, much to my surprise, when I got to the gangway and proceeded to the boat waiting for me, (laughs) I was going to ride in the admiral's barge.

That name may be misleading. In England, the king and queen ride on a barge, not on a regular boat. Well, I was in the admiral's barge, which was an especially nice small boat. It had a canopy over the front. It had a place for the admiral's flag at the back, but the admiral's flag wasn't on it. Nevertheless, as this boat approached the *Dyson*, the men were looking at it, wondering what that boat was doing (laughs) coming to the *Dyson*. I'm sure they were disappointed to see that I was the one who was getting out of the boat.

But it was quite an adventure to a young ensign onboard the battleship *New Jersey* and to have lunch at Admiral Halsey's table. By stretching my neck politely, I could see that the bulkhead across the ship was covered with maps of, apparently, all parts of the world. I would dearly love to have seen some of this at close hand, but it would not have been proper to ask for a guide to the admiral's CIC room. I would not have had the security clearance, (laughs) for one thing. But it was quite an adventure anyway, to have lunch there.

DePue: Well, it says quite a bit about how different World War II was, especially from the wars we fought after that. You've got a former governor of the State of Minnesota, who ends up being a commander in the Navy. Is that the rank equivalent to a lieutenant colonel in the Army?

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: So, I mean, it's a good rank, but it's quite a ways below what an admiral would have been.

Yeager: Well, yes, but for a civilian, a pretty high rank and suitable for a former governor.

DePue: But he was just an officer in the Navy at that time?

Yeager: Well, he was an officer in the Navy, but he would have had a special program of "indoctrination" to acquaint him with Navy ways, and he was assigned to the admiral's staff.

DePue: After that timeframe, just looking at the record of the USS *Dyson*, I know that, in January, the ship was in the China Sea. Do you remember that timeframe?

Yeager: Yes, very well. We ventured into the China Sea. We were the warship, with a small fleet of about half a dozen tankers and supply vessels, to meet and rendezvous with some ships in the China Sea. One of the memorable things about that trip was that, the next day, there was a report from Tokyo Rose, whom we heard occasionally on our radios.

Tokyo Rose reported that our fleet had been sighted, and they had an exact count of the number of different kinds of ships in our little fleet. Every detail was correct, except for one. The final statement was, "All ships were sunk." We didn't even see the scouting plane that must have sighted us. We all returned safely to our (laughs) various places. But Tokyo Rose had to tell what the emperor wanted to hear.

DePue: Did you actually, physically hear that radio report?

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: Did that kind of thing make you and others angry or just amused by it all?

Yeager: Most amused by it.

DePue: In February I understand, the ship was back in the Leyte area, in the Philippines area. Did you start, somewhere in this process, working out of Subic Bay and near Corregidor, as well?

Yeager: Yes, from the time we joined the Third Fleet at Ulithi in very early November until January, we served with the Third Fleet. Then, our Fletcher-class destroyers were replaced by the newer, bigger destroyers. So, we felt we were (laughs) being sidelined. We were assigned now to the Seventh Fleet, which was under the command of General MacArthur. That seemed to us to be downgrading us quite a bit.

DePue: A fleet under the command of an Army general?

Yeager: He was the overall commander of the Pacific theater, and so we were part of the Army at that point. Our first assignment was Corregidor. We bombarded Corregidor until it was finally subdued. We would lie offshore, maybe half a mile, and lob shells into the caves on the wall of Corregidor. Some of the caves were used for storage, munitions. Some were for trade goods the Japanese wanted to give or sell to the natives. Some were used for quarters for their men. We helped to bombard Corregidor into submission.

Paratroopers had already landed there, and we were called on to support. One night, when several hundred Japanese were attacking our forces, we and our sister ship laid down a heavy barrage. The next day, they said there were 250 Japanese dead from that barrage, and that ended the attack.

One of the values we had, out of that experience, was that we were working with Marine spotters, who would guide our shooting by saying, "Up five, right three." Five and three meant yards. They would help us adjust our firing, so they would be exactly where the Marines wanted it.

So, we had conversations by radio with Marine officers, and after a bit, we started exchanging visits with them. We would invite two or three of these Marine officers at a time, when they were off duty, to come to the ship. We let them take a fresh-water shower. We'd serve them a steak dinner with ice cream. Well, they would have given us the island, if (both laugh) they could. What they did, however, was to invite us to come two or three at a time.

So, I had my turn of going ashore and getting a jeep ride up Monkey Hill. I was the junior guest of the driver. My senior colleague got to sit with the driver. I sat over the cover, over the rear wheel of the jeep. Well, we went up the hill to a point where it started sloping down on the other side, and we came face to face—well, head to head—with a truck.

On the back of the truck, which was backing down the slight hill, was a machine gun, and the truck driver said, "I think you'd better turn around." So, our driver turned around. By the time we got down to the dock—it took about twenty minutes—we were told that the people we had talked to had been attacked. So, we narrowly escaped an attack. I was really quite happy to get back on the ship. We had quite an adventure that way, of seeing what was going on.

We stayed around there for several weeks, until Manila Bay was cleared for a ship of our size. That day, we had to leave to go to Lingayen. But, while were there, we also helped to rescue crewmen who had been in a minesweeper, which had been struck by a mine and had been severely damaged. Several men were killed.

We brought some of the wounded on our ship. One of the men was unconscious. We had no sickbay. We had no hospital. We lay the man on our wardroom table. I was off duty, so I was helping the doctor, trying to care for this man. The doctor said, "He has a bad wound in his forehead. Apparently, some shrapnel has struck him in the forehead." He says, "He won't last very long." Sure enough, in an hour or two he had died. So, we had a sad trip back to Subic Bay that day, with wounded men and several men who had died in that blast.

We never lost a man on our own ship, during the war. We had one severe injury and had to transfer the man to a larger ship, where he could be treated for a crushed chest. But we never lost a man on the ship, during the war, while I was on it.

DePue: How did that happen?

Yeager: Well, this man was assigned as a crewmember for one of the quad Bofors guns. They were in small turrets. There was no roof over the area, but there were seats for two operators to sit. They could be swiveled around in different directions, to guide their guns. Somebody had left on a secondary switch so that, when the main switch was turned on for the little assembly, so they could turn it, the gun barrels of the Bofors swung around and hit this man on the chest.

He was severely injured. He had to be placed in a litter. We were able to rig lines between our ship and a larger ship, which could have a doctor and help this man. So, he was transported across a heavy rope, between our ship and the larger ship.

DePue: You mentioned earlier that one of the things that the destroyers would do would be running back and forth between the various ships in the—

Yeager: Yes.

DePue: …fleet, delivering messages. I'm thinking you're probably burning through an awful lot of fuel then. Did you have the experience of refueling at sea?

Yeager: Oh, we did. Many times, every third day. If we were operating with the carriers, we would use so much fuel that we'd have to refuel every third day. Sometimes it was an aircraft carrier. A couple of times, when we were alongside a carrier, the carrier's band would come out on deck and play music for us while we siphoned off their oil. They had enormous tanks, so they could supply other ships at sea.

DePue: Was that a delicate operation, to get refueled at sea?

Yeager: It was, if the sea was rough. If it was a moderate sea, it could be done. But, when the sea was very rough, you couldn't do it at all. The *Spence* had tried to refuel the morning that the typhoon of December eighteenth had broken. What they'd do is shoot across a line with a gun.

That little line is used to pull a bigger line, and then a heavy line, across. The heavy line, then, is used to haul over to your ship, in this case, a large fueling hose. Well, in attempting to refuel the *Spence*, twice the fueling hose was broken. They were never able to get any fuel, and they had to give up. So, they ran out of fuel and capsized.

No, we were very dependent on the bigger ships. The destroyer had no armor, and it had very limited fuel tanks, considering the size of its engines and the amount of fuel it required.

DePue: You read a lot of military accounts of the veterans themselves. It's not necessarily always excitement and action that you're involved in. There's an awful lot of downtime, where there's just not as much to do. You've got a letter here, dated January 30, 1945, again to Natalee, where you get a real flavor of this. I'm going to read this and then get your reaction to what I read.

"Dearest Natalee, did you ever go to bed at night, with the firm resolution to do a good day's work the next day? And the next day, something happened or someone came in, and you hardly accomplished a thing? That's exactly what occurred today. I was all set to carry out a heavy schedule of work and studying, and besides, see that my department did a lot of extra things, since I knew they wouldn't be very busy. But instead, I spent most of my time sitting around and waiting for a superior officer. I did manage to squeeze in a haircut before lunch. "Finally, we had a conference, for an hour. It was a good meeting and really worth all the waiting.

There is—maybe I should say, at least one—one virtue I'm learning in the Navy, and that is patience. (both laugh) I have learned to sit for hours, do nothing at all, perhaps, or possibly shooting the breeze with fellow officers. I have learned not to fret over unavoidable delays and that there is a lot of personal value in just doing nothing, once in a while. Also, it humbles one,

and one realizes that one man alone can do little in a great organization and that, in working with so many others, delays and ideas you don't agree with are bound to occur. The individual is important, but so is the group. Love always, Iver."

Yeager: Well, certainly, after all the time I had to spend in San Francisco, waiting for a ship, and the time I had to spend in Pearl Harbor, waiting for assignment to a ship, day after day, it gets a little monotonous. You want to get something done. You're eager to be on with the job, instead of just waiting and waiting and waiting.

On board the ship, there were times, really, when it was quite monotonous, where there really wasn't much going on. Often we were on a routine patrol, going back and forth and back and forth, close to our sister ship, and turning, periodically reversing course, turning again, going back. So, you get used to a lot of routine and are grateful for it.

Night was often, by no means, routine. Quite often, I'd hit the bunk, maybe at eleven o'clock at night, be roused a half an hour later for general quarters, stand general quarters for perhaps the rest of the night, go on watch possibly again at 6:00 in the morning or 8:00. So, there were times when we really wanted some quiet and peace.

A general-quarters alarm was an alarm that I heard several times, after I left the Navy. I'd hear it in my dreams. (both laugh) But I got over that, eventually.

DePue: What would be the cause that would lead to a general-quarters?

Yeager: Well, the report of a kamikaze or a report of some suspicious ship or activity. Usually it was the threat of an attack in the daytime by kamikazes. They didn't operate at night. But often, we'd had some word that there was some sighting of something that somebody had seen, and so, the whole group of ships would go on general-quarters.

DePue: We've talked already, quite a few times, about your experiences in Okinawa waters. My understanding is the actual Army and Marine landings were in an early April timeframe. I also understand that the *Dyson* didn't get there until May. Does that match with your memory of things?

Yeager: I think so. I'll admit that there wasn't anything that really seemed to tie in with the world events, about our going to Okinawa. So, I'm a little hazy in my memory about just when we went there. But that's probably about right.

DePue: By the time you got in the waters around Okinawa, was there any threat at all from enemy, surface ships?

Yeager: I don't think so. I don't think we ever had any threat.

DePue: Do you know where the kamikazes were flying from?

Yeager: Well, some of the southern islands. There's a number of islands, extending south from the main islands of Japan. Most of them had to come, I think, from those islands. I think it would have been too far to come from the mainland of China, for example.

DePue: Do you remember any other stories or incidents that occurred, during that timeframe, when you were in the waters around Okinawa?

Yeager: No, I was able to go ashore on Okinawa and spent half a day just wandering around. It appeared that the Army had apparently scalped the land, looking for any possible booby traps in the soil, I suppose. But I saw no natives. A couple of places, I found some broken pottery, indicating that somebody had lived there at one time. But it was a pretty empty place.

By the time we were operating there, the Navy already had, I think, a twenty-mile, paved highway, along the side of Okinawa. So, the military had developed it very fast and had quite an operation there.

I would like to mention a few things about the mainland and Leyte, when we were operating there. We went ashore a number of times. Sometimes I was with one of my fellow officers, sometimes alone. But I recall one time, when I went a little ways and found a clearing, and in the clearing, was a Singer treadle sewing machine. It was shielded from overhead rain by a blanket that was suspended on four little poles at each of the corners of the machine.

Well, these people didn't speak much English, but we did understand that, what they wanted was needles for their sewing machine, and we didn't have any. We were sorry we couldn't help them. We went a little further and saw where one of the families was living. They had a thatched roof, over a platform, which was about two feet off the ground. There were some steps going up it, for the chickens and for the people to use. But they had to have it up so the pigs couldn't get up on the platform. They had a couple of little pigs, underneath the place.

Nearby was a small stream, with a log across it. To entertain us, little boys—I suppose, maybe, they were somewhere between five and seven or eight years old—would say, "Give me a nickel, Joe. Give me a nickel." Apparently, every G.I. was Joe. So, we would toss a nickel into the water, and two or three of them would dive off the log. Pretty soon, one of them would come back up, holding the nickel or dime or maybe even a quarter, once in a while.

We had a chance to wander around one time, and a farmer took us along the path to his cornfield, which was probably not much larger than this

room. (laughs) But he was quite proud of his cornfield. So, we had a chance to see some of the people.

One last incident, possibly, might be our trip to Iloilo. From another ship, we were directed to provide cover for a landing on the shore of Iloilo Island. When two ships are together, the question arises immediately, what's the signal number of the other captain? The Navy uses signal numbers. The lower the number, the higher the status.

So, when we were going to be teamed up with another vessel, and we'd know the name of the ship, we'd look up in the record and find out who the captain was, and we would know the captain's signal number. If lower than our captain's, the other captain would be in command. If not, then our captain would be in command.

Now, in this case, the other captain was in command. We went to the area in the darkness of night, and using radar, located the stream and bridge, which we were to bombard for the landing. Well, actually, we were going to bombard the jungle back a ways, maybe a hundred yards or so, from the beach. We were supposed to soften the enemy there, in the way, by bombardment, so that our troops could land.

Well, we proceeded to launch some shells, and pretty soon, we heard a most unusual thing over the voice radio. You never used plain English. Well, you're not supposed to. But, in this case, this embarrassed voice said, "I think we're at the wrong bridge." (DePue laughs) Well, let's look at the radarscope. The maps indicated that, about two miles apart, there were streams, each having a bridge over it, some distance from the shore, so that, on radar, it looked like we were at the right place. But there was, essentially, the same configuration, two miles away.

So, we started for the other site, and by the time we got there, we realized we didn't need to do any bombardment. There were about two hundred men, women and children, waving wildly to us. (laughs) We had a welcoming party. So, we didn't need to do any bombardment. So, that was a happy ending, but a much embarrassing one, for somebody.

DePue: How did it make you feel though to have the population so happy to see you?

Yeager: Well, we were happy about that. It signaled to us that, at least that area was a pretty safe territory.

DePue: Did it also give you the notion, which reinforced the notion, that this was the right war to be fighting?

Yeager: I think so. I was convinced of it by that time, certainly. In fact, Pearl Harbor really made an enormous change in the outlook, I think, of the general population of the country and, certainly, of our younger people. Although we

had a hundred and seventy-five men who signed the petition, protesting getting involved in Europe's war, I think, with rare exceptions, every able-bodied man who was not a pre-theologian or a premedical student, was in the service, after two years. Bob Hood and I were about the last able-bodied men to leave the campus, because we were both in V-7 and had this arrangement with the Navy, so that we could finish college before we went in.

DePue: Did you understand the devotion that the Japanese people had to the war or the ferocity with which their soldiers and sailors and airmen fought?

Yeager: Well, I think that was evident from the reports we had of what the Marines and others had to undergo, when they had these ground attacks and had to fight, foot by foot almost, for every advance. Now, the intensity, I think, was very, very real, and we, I suppose, didn't understand just why it was so intense. But I think it must have been simply that the people were so indoctrinated that they were willing to give up life quite readily.

DePue: Well, let's take a different tack altogether here. April 12, 1945 was the day that FDR died. Do you remember hearing that news?

Yeager: Yes. We were deeply saddened. I had not voted for FDR. I was a staunch Republican at that time, and I had not voted for FDR in his final election. That was my first election, by the way. But we were deeply saddened by his death and really upset, wondering what would happen now, with the death of the commander in chief.

We really didn't know anything about that man, Truman, except that he'd been a haberdasher, and that didn't seem like a very promising background for a commander in chief. Had we known then that he had read widely in history and the history of warfare and, had we known then, that he had been actively involved in the government at various levels and had himself been in World War I, we might have had our fears somewhat abated. But, at the time, we really were wondering, seriously, what would happen with the new commander in chief.

DePue: It wasn't too long after that—May eighth—that the war ended in Europe. Do you remember hearing that news?

Yeager: Oh, yes. And we were very happy at that news. That was great news, but (laughs) we knew we had a long ways to go, yet, in the Pacific theater.

DePue: Was there ever a moment, during the time you were actually in the Navy, when you thought we might not win this war?

Yeager: I don't think so. I think we had confidence that we were going to do it and could do it. We made enough advances, I think, to reinforce that. By the time I was on active duty, it was pretty clear that we were going to really make inroads in Europe. I was at Plattsburg, of course, when D-Day happened, June

the sixth, and the landing at Normandy. But we were making enough headway in Europe that I really believed that we were going to win. I think I recognized also that it was going to be a very serious war, a very difficult one. But, I think we had great confidence that we could do it and would do it.

DePue: Well, by the time you get to V-E Day in Europe—May eighth—I would think that things are getting wrapped up in Okinawa. But you know that the next big step is that you've got to invade the mainland of Japan, as well. What were the folks thinking at that time, especially after the nature of combat at Iwo Jima and Okinawa and the kamikaze attacks and, as we mentioned before, just the ferocity that they fought the war? What were your thoughts about the mainland invasion?

Yeager: Well, we recognized that the men who fought on the ground really were going to have a tough time, that fighting Japan, on its own homeland, was really going to be very, very difficult. There were indications that they were trying to arm practically every person with at least some kind of a knife or club or some kind of weapon to fend off the invading people.

I was in touch, periodically, with my older brother. Anson had joined the Army quite early in the war, became an officer and was assigned as an aide to Major General Harry Hazlett, who was the commanding officer of the Fort Benning military establishment. That was where the troops were given their final preparation for fighting in Europe. One of the trips that Anson made, with the general, was to fly to Italy, and they were actually at Anzio, when that was still a very hot place to be.

So, we were aware that things were difficult in Europe too. But there'd been enough progress, by even the time of FDR's death, that it seemed to us, I think, that the outcome was not in doubt. The timing of that outcome was still very open, and so, when we heard the startling news about the atomic bomb, we really welcomed that news.

When my men came in, the radar CIC's station telling me about the great bomb that had been exploded, my first reaction was, "It sounds to me like you're listening to the equivalent of Tokyo Rose, but on our side." Well, the news communiqués made it clear that this really did happen. Of course, we then realized that this was the wonderful thing we'd been waiting for. This was going to end the war. And it did.

DePue: Did you have a comprehension of what an atomic bomb actually was, at that time, though?

Yeager: No. No, we had no idea.

DePue: Well, I'm going to read one more letter here, because I think this one is covering this timeframe. You know, we take a lot of things for granted today, because we have an understanding. We've grown up with an understanding,

and here it is, from your perspective, at the time. This is dated August 8, 1945. The A bomb was dropped on August the sixth, on Hiroshima and August ninth, on Nagasaki. So, this is exactly in between those two events.

"All over the ship, little groups of men were clustered together. With every one of them, the topic is the same, 'Did you hear the latest on the new bomb?' All day yesterday and last night too, the talk went on. Today, new statements have been released, and so there has been even more information and speculation about this new weapon. The claims which had been made sound fantastic, just as if Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon had moved into 1945.

"Yet, I see no reason why the U.S. would wish to make any unfounded statements. Possibly, if the high officials thought that the moment for a good psychological move had come, and that, with one big bluff, they could force the immediate end of the war, such deception might be used. However, I don't think that is the case. It would be just as great a hoax to the American people as to the Japanese. If it didn't work, we would not lose face with the other nations of the world, but we would cause more headache and heartache at home, than did the false armistice of the last war. Moreover, we're winning the war. Why should we create lies?

"So, I have come to the conclusions that there is a pretty solid basis of fact and that this terrible, new weapon will do much to hasten the end of the war. One thing I fear, if we have completed such a powerful bomb, cannot other nations do the same? Must they not already have made great progress in discovering the secrets of the atom? Perhaps, and very fortunately, we succeeded first. The destruction of the new bomb, in terms of human suffering and the cost of human lives, is inestimable. The long-term economic havoc its use would wreak would make Japan a dependent nation for centuries. On the dark side of the picture, the atomic weapon could spell the end of civilization, if not of mankind and all the higher species of life.

"Its announcement makes it imperative that we do all to make the United Nations a success, a peaceful organization, guided by a world Security Council. I still have enough faith to believe men can do it, if only they will. But, it is no longer a matter of choice. It is a must."

What I find interesting here is that you're echoing the spirit of the country in the 1950s and '60s, with this nuclear threat hanging overhead all of the time. But, I'm talking too much here. What are your reflections, having heard that again, after all these years?

Yeager: Well, I've had great faith in the United Nations, with all of its limitations and faults. It's vastly superior, I think, to the (laughs) League of Nations, and I think it's wonderful to have a forum, where even the smallest nations have a voice. It's an unwieldy organization in many ways, and we're experiencing

that now, with trying to get Russia and China to put some more pressure on Syria.

But overall, I think it's been a very helpful organization, and I look forward to the time when it will be even more important than it is now.

DePue: Well, it wasn't but a week after you wrote this letter that Japan surrendered, unconditionally, and a couple of weeks after that, that they had that very famous formal Japanese surrender on the *USS Missouri*.

Where was the *USS Dyson*, at that time? That was September second, when the formal ceremony occurred.

Yeager: Well, we were still in the Okinawa area, and, once it became clear that the war was over, the Navy, obviously, had grand plans for what to do with all those ships and people. We were gathered, in the first fleet, to return from the Pacific theater to the mainland. It was called the Tenth Fleet, and we were one of four destroyers in that group. There was a couple of small carriers and some other ships in the fleet. We were led, actually, by the mighty *Missouri*, which guided us from Okinawa to Pearl Harbor.

The Navy had its plans, and, for reasons which became quite clear later, the Navy wanted the *Dyson* and three other ships from the squadron to be in Washington, D.C. for Navy Day, which was in November of that year, for the big, public celebration of the end of the war.

Well, the Navy had plans—and we heard about this, while we were at Pearl Harbor, after the war was over—to send 375 ships to various ports and installations on the East Coast, the West Coast, the Gulf Coast and the major rivers, like the Mississippi. Well, our ship then was in that first group to come back, leaving from Okinawa on September the tenth, arriving about ten days later at Pearl Harbor, where we spent about three or four days, and then continuing on to Panama and the canal and up the East Coast to Washington, D.C.

The squadron, called the Little Beaver Squadron, DesRon 23, had performed admirably during its first cruise out in the Pacific. That was before I joined the ship. It was then under the command of Arleigh Burke, later to become an admiral. He was a very daring leader.

There was a narrow slot at Guadalcanal. The Japanese had shore batteries on both sides of this narrow slot. They had lots of their troop ships and supply ships anchored along there. It was a rather narrow strip of water, but Arleigh Burke led the squadron, in a single-file fashion, through that slot at thirty-one knots, which is a pretty fast speed for a narrow passageway. As the destroyers went, they would fire at the ships and land installations. The Japanese returned the fire, but they never hit one of the ships. They were going too fast for the gunners to get the range and distance.

Because of that and other feats, during that period of very difficult times in the Pacific theater, the squadron rated the Presidential Unit Citation, one of the greatest honors that a group of ships can be given. The Navy wanted representatives of that squadron to be present at Washington, D.C. on Navy Day. So, while we were still at Pearl Harbor, I learned that my ship was going to Washington, D.C.

My brother's wife Ada May was a WAVE, [Women Accepted for Volunteer, Emergency Service] and in the coding section. She saw the same news report that I saw, but she saw it in Washington, D.C., where she was sitting. It actually was not very far from the Navy base. So, Ada May wrote to Natalee and invited her to come for a week. So, Natalee and I had almost a week together, after we got back to the U.S., because of this special honor to the ship and the other ships in the squadron.

I did not share the honor, because I wasn't on the ship, but I had reflected glory, at least, and had the benefit of being among the first to come back to the U.S. So that was quite a celebration.

DePue: What was it like to finally get together with Natalee, after all that time?

Yeager: Oh, it was wonderful. I met her at the train, of course, and it was really a wonderful occasion. We had several days. Whenever I was not on watch duty at the ship, I could do what I wanted, so we had several days and several evenings to sightsee and just to be with each other.

We saw a lot of the sites in Washington. We had some special dinners on the ship. Natalee got to meet some of my friends there, got to see the ship and even got inside one of the gun turrets. It was not a really very easy place to get into, for a woman wearing a skirt, but she did it.

DePue: When you left for war, the nature of the conversations were very noncommittal, in terms of what your future together might be. Was that now changing for you, or had it already changed?

Yeager: Well, it was still open, and I was still giving a lot of thought to it. I realized it was really a major decision. I realized more and more what a serious decision this would be, a lifetime decision. So, I gave it a lot of thought. We waited a while, until we'd had, not only that visit, but a couple of brief visits in Minneapolis, before we finally became engaged. So, it took a little while to get used to the idea (laughs) that we really could do it now.

DePue: But the way you just described it, Iver, it was kind of this mutual conversation, "Well, should we get engaged or not?" Or was there a moment when you actually, as they say, popped the question?

Yeager: Oh, yes. I did pop the question, and she said yes.

DePue: With no hesitation?

Yeager: No hesitation.

DePue: When did that occur? Do you remember?

Yeager: I believe it was November the eighth.

DePue: So, you'd be back in the States for—

Yeager: It wasn't really a great surprise to her, because I'd taken her to a jewelry store to look at rings in downtown Minneapolis. So, she had a pretty good hunch that something was coming.

DePue: Well, let's get you back to Washington, D.C., then. What after that?

Yeager: Well, we spent several days there, after the war. Then we proceeded north to the Brooklyn Navy Yard and spent a couple of months in Brooklyn. That was a great time too, because we got to see a lot of the Broadway shows. Servicemen could get tickets for the same night for a performance for about $5-6.00, so we saw a lot of Broadway shows. We saw a lot of museums, on our time off. Two of us spent a whole day traveling around by ferry and by subway and some of these fast-food places they had. I think we spent the whole day and spent seventy-five cents apiece.

We had a wonderful time there, while we made the ship ready for decommissioning and mothballing. Major repairs were needed. We had some experiences there. By that time, I was one of the senior officers left on the ship. By that time, I was also a J.G., a lieutenant junior grade, as of the first of the year in '46. It was really automatic. After a year and a half of ensign, you made J.G.

But, I was one of the senior officers on the ship, and when a fire broke out, due to a faulty cable providing electricity to the ship, I had to call the Navy fire department and the Brooklyn Navy Yard to come and put it out. I was there when we were all off the ship, but they wanted to test the engines. So, they had the ship moored at a dock, with several heavy hawsers, turned on the speed on the engines, broke all the lines, and the ship went about ten feet and hit a solid wall. No damage was done, but a rather odd experience.

One of the unique experiences in that period was that the Navy was decommissioning two ships, which had Negro crews. Eleanor Roosevelt had a hand in getting the Navy to give better treatment to Negroes, and the Navy finally agreed to train Negroes for other than steward-type jobs. So, they trained enough men to man a couple of small ships. We got a notice one day that we would have a radar man, a black man, from this ship.

By then, the head of our CIC gang was a young chap, maybe nineteen years old, from Tennessee, a really nice kid. I said, "Tommy, we're going to get a Negro member of our crew," and he said—not in protest, I think, but in sort of disbelief—"Mr. Yeager, it'll never work." He had a marvelous Tennessee accent. I said, "Well, you don't have to do anything with him socially. Off duty, you don't have to do anything with him. But, when he's on duty, you have to treat him like everybody else."

About two weeks later, I went into the CIC room. They were sitting on the deck and leaning against the bulkhead, drinking coffee. I just said hello and got the reports I was looking for and went out. The next time I saw Tommy, I said, "Tommy, I saw you drinking coffee with this fellow. How come?" He said, "Mr. Yeager, it's the first time I got to know one of them."

I thought that was quite an insight. He'd grown up with Negroes all his life. This was the first time he'd ever met one who was his equivalent, in social and academic status. But that was quite an insight, I thought, for Tommy.

DePue: What had been your view about the segregated nature of the Navy, up to that point?

Yeager: Well, I deplored it. I thought that Negroes should be treated better than they were. They had the lowest positions when we were not fighting, and when we were fighting, they had the worst places to be, well down, below decks—the lowest places in the ship—to load ammunition. So, they were not treated well.

But we really tried to treat them decently and with respect, never bawled them out, never criticized them. Sometimes, we had to call their attention to things they needed to do, but they were respectful, and so I think we treated them pretty well.

There was some conflict between the two mess boys who served us—they were illiterate—and the captain's boy. It was a young man not a boy, but he obviously was a higher status than our mess members. Every now and then, we'd hear a clatter in the little compartment next to our wardroom, where the kitchenette was for the mess for the officers.

The senior officers would dash for the (laughs) compartment, because they knew what was going on. It was a knife fight, and one of the Negroes would wind up with bandages over his hands and wrists. Often, it was because this other Negro would do something to irritate these two men.

One of them was a large man. I called him "Big Moor." He was a big man, probably at least six feet and maybe a hundred and eighty, two hundred pounds. But he was very gentle and very decent. I loaned him $20 one time, so he could send it to his wife, and he returned it later on. But we tried to treat

them well and not lord it over them. But we never, of course, would have invited them to have a meal with us or to sit with us.

Now, the Navy was very much a segregated society. It was also very much a class society. If you were an officer, you had it made. You had a lot of privileges and rights and opportunities, not open to even the highest-ranking enlisted men. But they had their own stratification too. Chief petty officer was the highest rank for an enlisted man.

We had a very fine chief boatswain's mate. He'd been in the Navy twenty years. His name was Makulis, and when, for some reason, I had to have some dealings with the deck crew or there was something on deck I wanted to call attention to, I could talk with him. He was very decent about it. He knew far more about the Navy than I did and how to do things. I didn't have any hesitation, and he didn't make any point of, "Well, this young guy doesn't know what he's doing." (laughs) He was very decent about it.

DePue: We've got just a few more minutes to go here, maybe fifteen, at the most. I definitely want to have you talk about the experience of mothballing. I guess that happened in Charleston Harbor.

Yeager: Yes. Well, after the couple of months in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, I think it was in late January, we headed south for Charleston. We were supposed to steam at eighteen knots to make it a quick trip, but the water was so rough that we had to slow down, and it took us a little longer. So, we entered the harbor at Charleston and went to the Navy base, which was located along the Wando River. There were four rivers in and around Charleston. That's a very watery place. But we were in the Navy Yard and tied up at a dock, where we got electric service and a gangway, so we could get off the ship easily.

We had a lot to do with the ship. We had to have certain supplies repleted. For example, the Navy had a requirement of how many kinds of this device you needed for a radar system. We had to go through all the records and bring everything up to snuff. They also had a specially trained crew to cover the gun mounts with a plastic foam that was sprayed over a netting and would make a watertight seal to the deck and over the gun mount, so that they would be resistant to rust. Well, this took several months.

Finally, the ship was ready to be anchored upstream. The *Dyson* was to be the host ship, so to speak, with three other destroyers, tied side-by-side to it. They were anchored to immense concrete blocks, placed in the river. Well, the river, at that point, had a flow of maybe three or four knots. But, when the tide was going out, the flow would be about seven or eight knots. So, the ships would really tug at the anchors from their bow. In the night, when the tide was coming in, the tide would reverse the flow of the river, and the ships would go a little ways the other way, anchored as they were, at both bow and stern. We had to spend every third night on the ship.

Natalee and I had been married on March the first. So, after a honeymoon in Atlanta, Georgia, we spent the next two or three months in Charleston, where we had a nice apartment. Natalee was able to shop at the ship service, which had a fine grocery and a gift store, where you could get Chanel No. 5 and wristwatches and things at bargain prices and find groceries at very good prices. She went by city bus, and I used the city bus to make my trips to the *Dyson*. But, every third night I had to be on the ship.

Natalee Carlender and Iver Yeager at their wedding in March, 1946 in Minneapolis.

So, on nights when I was at home, we would invite friends, like Marvin Snyder and Madison Mills, to have dinner with us. I also met a man I'd known at Midshipmen's School, a Bill Straub from South Carolina, who was married and had his wife there and their little four-year-old girl. They invited us over. They were also very nice to Natalee. They took her for trips out in the country, when I was busy at the ship.

We liked Charleston. It was an interesting place to be, with a lot of historic places. We could not get to Fort Sumter. It was closed to tourists, and we couldn't get out there, but we liked to walk along the battery. There were beautiful homes and a nice vista, with Fort Sumter in the distance. We enjoyed our stay there. Natalee left in late May to attend her brother's wedding in Memphis, Tennessee.

Her brother Les, a doctor, was married in Memphis, Tennessee. So, she attended his wedding and then went on to Macalester for her college graduation. About two and a half weeks later, I was out of the Navy. I had enough points, by that time, to leave. I was one of three officers left on the ship. So, I'd been through the whole process of refitting the ship in Brooklyn and the process of mothballing it at Charleston.

I became acquainted with the full force of segregation. The policy was that white people had the seats at the front, and they had all seats that were there in the bus, if they needed them. If there were any seats that whites were not occupying, at the back, then the Negroes could sit in those seats.

Well, I had an interesting experience on the bus one night, because enough whites got off the bus, toward the front, so that there were several

vacant seats. But a white woman had been sitting in the backward part and refused to move. The bus driver politely asked her to move up. so there would be room for the Negroes to sit. She wouldn't do it. at least for about fifteen or twenty minutes. Then finally, she got up and moved. But I thought the bus driver handled it quite well.

It was an interesting time, because there were enough men by that time, who had been in the war, who had come back to Charleston and were determined to make that sleepy, old town (laughs) somewhat up to date. So, it was interesting to read the newspapers and find out what was going on in the city council. I also had the occasion twice to serve as a "lawyer," and found that that was not my field of expertise. (DePue laughs)

One of our seamen had been arrested for unruly conduct and accosting a young woman on the street. Well, his version of it was that he had met this young woman on the street, and they were having a conversation, when she suddenly spotted her husband in a convertible, driving by. At that point, she started making a fuss, so that her husband would think that she was being accosted by this man. So, he got arrested.

Well, I related that explanation to the judge at the city court. He would have none of that. He gave the seaman and me and all that were present a lengthy lecture about Southern chivalry and how people in the South treat women. He fined Channel $100, with $60 suspended for good behavior. Channel had $20, so I had to give him $20 so he could go back to the ship. He never repaid me, incidentally. But, at any rate, he was soon released from the Navy and got to go home. That was one experience.

Another experience I had in trying to be a lawyer and being unsuccessful was when one of our seaman, a man named Malone, a big husky man, with whom I often stood watches. When we stood watches at night, when were tied at a dock, both overseas and in this country, we'd have an officer and a seaman on duty. We were often on duty together, and we got along well. But, he had gone one night in Charleston to a tavern that was frequented by officers.

He was an enlisted man, and he and an officer got into an argument. Malone, who was a pretty good sized man, (laughs) decked the officer. Well, that doesn't go over very well with the Navy, regardless of provocation or anything else, and, despite Malone's explanations and my best efforts before the captain, who held a deck court, the captain fined him several days' pay, and that was the end of it. But, I couldn't really be of help to either of those people. (laughs) So, I decided not to be a lawyer.

DePue: Well, I'm going to have to jump in here, because we are facing a couple of deadlines. We are pretty close to filling up the memory chip that I record these on, and this has been an amazing experience. You have a wonderful memory

and a great way of having it all organized in your mind. I commend you for that. It's important history that we've been collecting, as well. At least, I think it is. I really appreciate having the chance to interview you.

Yeager: Well, I appreciate that very much. Thank you, Mark.

DePue: A couple of quick questions, and they do need to be quick, I'm afraid, to close this up. Do you think that your military experience changed you?

Yeager: Yes, of course. I learned even more responsibility than I had had previously. I really had to assume great responsibility, as a line officer on the ship. I had sixty men in my division to be responsible for, to encourage them to get education to pass the next Navy stage of training in their particular field, and so on. I had this wonderful experience of living and working with, on the whole, really very good men, both officers and enlisted. It really widened my horizons and made me much more aware of the world.

The Navy sent me to places I might never have gone to otherwise, Upstate New York; Hollywood Beach, Florida; San Francisco—I probably would have gone there anyway—Pearl Harbor; certainly, (laughs) the Philippines. So, I had some wonderful experiences in the Navy, and, I think, interesting ones and worthwhile ones. I think it was a great benefit to me, personally, and a lot of rich memories, which I shared in later years at various ship's reunions.

Though, the Navy never became the same kind of an iconic experience that I think it did for many other men, because I had graduate school afterwards. I had teaching at colleges afterwards. I had many later experiences, which were superimposed over the earlier years and were, to me, more important than the Navy.

DePue: Are you proud that you had the opportunity to serve in the Navy?

Yeager: Yes, I'm proud. I'm glad that I did it. I think, overall, it was a positive experience. I wouldn't have wanted to do it again, but I'm very happy and grateful that I survived, when so many people I knew did not survive or did not survive in very good shape.

So, overall, it was a good part of my life and an interesting part. I'm glad Natalee could share a little of it with me, at the end. But we had many years ahead of us.

DePue: Well, again, it's been quite an experience to interview you. I've really enjoyed it. You've got about a minute left. Do you have any final comments for us, Iver?

Yeager: Well, I found it very interesting to go through this experience, and I appreciate it. You've been, I think, a kind and helpful interviewer, and I've enjoyed it. If

we had another fifteen to twenty minutes, after you turn the machine off, I would like to interview you, Mark, (both laugh) and find out who you are and what you have done.

(End of interview)