

**ORAL HISTORY OF
DAVID C. ACHESON**

First Interview - January 27, 2010

This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Oral History Project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewee is David C. Acheson. The interviewer is Kurt J. Hamrock. The interview is taking place in the offices of McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP on January 27, 2010, beginning at 10:17 a.m. in the morning

(Tape 1)

MR. HAMROCK: Mr. Acheson, thank you very much for taking the time to sit with me today and to provide us with some of your memories of your personal life, your legal career, and your experiences in the District of Columbia these past few years. I would like to start by just asking you, if you would, to provide us with any thoughts, or reflections you have about your early life, childhood, or where you grew up, et cetera.

MR. ACHESON: Okay, alright, I will be brief about that. I was born in the District of Columbia, which surprises a lot of people. The reason I was born here is that my father had come here for a one-year job as the law clerk to Justice Brandeis on the Supreme Court. He had a marvelous time with that and he came here in 1919. I was born in 1921. Normally, at the end of one year, he would have left Washington to Boston where he had a commitment to join the Boston firm of Choate, Hall & Stuart. Brandeis's follow-on clerk died in the influenza epidemic of 1919. So Brandeis asked my father to stay another year. So he had the unique distinction, and for him, an enormous benefit, educationally speaking, of having two years with Brandeis. I was born here at the end of that time. I did not know this until much later, but sometime in 1920, when he was still with Brandeis, Brandeis invited a gentleman for lunch at his chambers named Edward B. Burling, who had been General Counsel of the War Shipping Board during World War I. That was a very, very, able lawyer who had been a legendary student at the Harvard Law School, and had a very interesting practice in Chicago where he picked up in his early years there an inventor client who invented a metal cutting machine, and the client, had no cash. He

was a brilliant inventor. Burling's firm allowed him to take stock in the company that he had helped found with the inventor. That later became TRW. It earned Mr. Burling a fortune which made him one of the richest men around. Anyway, my father was invited to join that lunch by the Justice, and Mr. Burling said that he was preparing to start a law firm here and would be interested to know whether my father would care to join them. My father, who was not all that discreet at that age, said, "Mr. Burling, I find it astonishing that a lawyer from Chicago could open a practice in Washington where the practices are local, really local," — real estate, banking and retail. Mr. Burling said, (my father never forgot this) he said, "Well, I believe the government of the United States has formed the habit of regulating businesses during this late war, and they will find that habit hard to break." Truer words were never spoken. So Dad did join the firm in 1921 and I was born that year.

My mother was an artist. She started painting and went to the very first class of the Corcoran Art Gallery. In her later years, she was a very accomplished painter and had many exhibitions in Washington, and showings in New York also. A very prolific painter and a very good one. A lot of people I know have her paintings as Christmas presents, or thank you presents, or something like that. As a kid I went to local schools. There was a well-known school here, Potomac School for younger children, that is now located in the State of Virginia. At the time that I was there it was located on California Street and S Street in Washington, and the playground was gravel and cement (both laugh), but it was a pretty good school. They took boys as far as the fourth grade and then only girls after that. So from there I moved on to the St. Albans School, which is pretty well known here. I stayed there through what they call the second form, which was the eighth grade. I had a good time there. It was a good school. One of the masters that I remember particularly vividly was a Mr. Jarman. We use to call him Pop

Jarman, and he was in the habit of throwing erasers, blackboard erasers at students when they did or said something stupid. Very entertaining. We were right at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Wisconsin Avenue. We quite frequently heard ambulance sirens in the classroom, and he would invariably say do not pay any attention to that, it is only a doctor going for a Coca-Cola. At the end of the eighth grade, or form two, as they called it, my father decided that I should go to boarding school. I think what was in his mind was that I needed an environment of a greater severity than a working father could provide. So he sent me to Groton School in Western Massachusetts. Quite an extraordinary school run by quite an extraordinary man, the Reverend Endicott Peabody. Peabody was a clergyman, as I indicated. His uncle, George Peabody, was a famous and very rich banker, an American banker in London. Peabody had worked for him briefly in London, and that persuaded him that banking was not for him. He made a friend there. A British friend who was preparing to go to the clergy. He persuaded Peabody to become a clergyman and take clerical education. Peabody did and was ordained (I don't know the date exactly) but it probably was the late 1870s. His first church, where he was (unusual for a freshman clergyman) assigned, not as second in command but as rector, was in Tombstone, Arizona, in the days of Wyatt Earp and "Doc" Holliday, and all those people whom Peabody knew intimately. He used to say he learned as much from them as he learned from any school he ever attended. He also said that he owed his life to the fact that he never carried a gun in Tombstone, Arizona. He was rector there for two or three years. I think three, but I am not certain. He made a name for himself there by starting a baseball league, two teams. He never had quite enough volunteers to really fill two teams, so before each scheduled game, he said he would go into a bar — (Peabody was a very strong, husky, very athletic man, and he looked big and powerful even in his eighties) — and recruit the first couple of sober men he saw and drag

them out to the field, (both laugh), assign them a position and they would play baseball. He had a great time there and he was a very good athlete, and a good baseball player. He earned the affection of the town because they all liked baseball. He was a novelty, and they liked him because he was a novelty. The fact that he was tough enough to handle himself in any dispute physically was impressive in those days and the fact that he did not carry a gun was impressive in those days. In the end, he decided what he really wanted to do was to educate young men in the Christian ethical system. He was never, as I recalled him, all that interested in theology. He was very interested in what I would call proselytizing the Christian ethical system. When I was a student at Groton, when he was headmaster there, he would always illustrate his ethical principles by some of the scandals involving major corporate misdeeds. Those were the days when railroad stocks were being issued fraudulently and bought and sold by speculators and there was a lot of dishonesty in the American financial scene, and he knew that pretty well. He would refer in his sermons to business scandals as examples to what good, solid, ethical businessmen should not do. There were a lot of sons of the rich at Groton (that did not include myself). A lot of them would joke about this saying, "When I own a railroad, I am really going to remember this (both laugh), when I run the biggest bank in America, I'm going to remember all of this." (both laugh) My father's reasons for sending me there, I think, were probably vindicated because I learned a lot. I learned how to toe-the-line at a school in which conformity was pretty much a given, but I had a good time. My father did not tell me until much later that when he had gone to Groton, he was very anti-conformity and very anti-the-snobbish-rich, that kind of thing, and had a tough time there. I always found that curious because perhaps the earliest close friend he had in his entire life was Averell Harriman. They made very close friends with each other at Groton. Years later when I was married, I was having lunch with

Averell, my wife, and I one Sunday. I said, "Averell, do you remember Dad at Groton?" He said, "Oh yes, of course." He said Dad rowed on the crew. "I was the captain on the crew because I was two years older, but Dean rowed on the crew as a very good stroke." So I said well, "How did Dad like Groton?" Oh, he said, "Dean hated Groton, and Groton hated him!" (both laugh) He said Dean did not like to conform but he learned a lesson and he got along alright. Sometime later, I was having lunch with my father and I said, "What's this about your hating Groton when you were there?" He said, "Who told you that?" I said, "Oh, never mind who told me but I have a good authority." (both laugh) "The thing that I am curious about," I said, "is not why you hated Groton, but if you hated Groton, why did you send me there?" He said, "I felt the reasons I hated Groton were reasons why it would be good for you." (both laugh) So, that's how I got to Groton. Anyway, I had a much better time at Groton than my father did and I was a very good student. I was always second, but once I was first. Most of the time, I stood about second in my class. Then I got on the tennis team, and I had a pretty good time. I took care not to offend the conformity standards while I was there, and I did not take care on account of anything my father told me. It's just instinctively, I felt this was the kind of place that ran a certain way, and if you were not prepared to accept that you were not really going to have much of a good time. I did not find it offensive to conform. Although I was skeptical always about some of the facets of the conformity standards at Groton. For example, every night for dinner we changed from our normal dress at Groton for class. Daytime was sport coat, slacks, shirt and tie, shoes, regular street shoes. Of course, the athletic period in the afternoon you wore whatever you did then for athletics. Then for dinner we always had to change into a shirt with a white stiff collar, a tie, and black patent leather shoes. That was the dress code, and it was an explicit dress code. When children were sent to Groton by their parents, they always got a letter

saying this is what your son will need to bring to Groton. This is why a whole list of things like this — I always thought that was sort of bizarre because my father wore a white detached collar from time to time but I thought for people my age it was pretty ridiculous. But, you know, nobody fussed about it. They just did it.

One day during the summer of my fifth forum year, fifth forum being equivalent to 11th grade, my father said to me, “You know, you want to start thinking about where you want to go to college.” So, I said, “Oh I know where I want to go to college. I have given it a lot of thought.” He said, “Really! Where is that?” I said, “The University of Pittsburgh.” He said, “Why on earth do you want to go there?” I said, “Because they had the best college football team in the United States.” (laughs) Dad was a wonderful actor. Instead of saying, Come on, you idiot, that’s a really dumb reason. He took this very suavely, and he said, “Well that is certainly one factor, but there are other factors you probably ought to consider.” One of them is, if you go to Yale, I will pay your tuition.” I did not think I was really serious about Pittsburgh. I think I really probably said that just to bait him. I knew he was a very enthusiastic Yale man. In fact, by that time, he was a member of the Yale Corporation, and I knew that too. Anyway, I did go to Yale and entered Yale in the autumn of 1939.

MR. HAMROCK: May I interrupt you for just a moment? Before we start talking about your college years, during the time you were growing up your parents were living here in Washington, DC.

MR. ACHESON; Oh, I should say that., okay.

Before I go on to Yale, a little about Washington. My parents first lived in a rental house over on Corcoran Street, just off of 18th Street, NW, Washington. Which was not a very elegant part of town then, but they had a comfortable little house right near Dupont Circle. By 1922,

they had found a house in Georgetown, which they could buy. The address was 2805 P Street, and they bought that house in 1922, I think, maybe '23, and I lived there until I was married and out of the Navy. They lived there until my father's death, and my mother lived there for another few years and then moved into an apartment. Georgetown was not, in those days, a very elegant part of town. There were some very elegant houses in Georgetown and there was a famous estate of the Bliss family, Dumbarton Oaks, in Georgetown. There is the famous estate of the Belin family, 28th and R streets, which is still there. The Belin descendents do own it still. Very elegant estate of many, many acres running down to the cemetery. Dumbarton Oaks was the residence of Jackson's Vice President, John C. Calhoun, Senator from South Carolina.

I will divert for just a minute to an interesting story about Dumbarton Oaks. It was owned by the Bliss family. Robert Woods Bliss and his wife Mildred. Mildred Bliss was the heiress of a great fortune in children's medicine, and they beautified Dumbarton Oaks and built a glorious garden that it still has, and they gave some thought in their advancing years about what to do with it after they died. They had no children that I can recall. In any event, they made a will, leaving it to the United States for the residence of the Vice President, reflecting the history of Calhoun's residence there. Bliss became an Ambassador to Argentina, under President Hoover. In 1932 when Roosevelt, who was a friend of Bliss, became President, Bliss wrote him a sort of jocose note saying, "Congratulations Franklin! In due course, you will, of course, be receiving my pro forma letter of resignation." Roosevelt did receive it, but contrary to the confidence that Bliss had, Roosevelt accepted his resignation., which infuriated Bliss. He and his wife, on their way home, stopped in New York to visit their lawyers and changed their will and left it to Harvard University, which now owns it. The Belin family had du Pont relatives and they inherited a lot of money from them. Their estate was always kept up, always in mint

condition, and it is still there in that condition. Very few people who had a lot of money chose to live in Georgetown. They wanted to live in Kalorama, or out in the further suburbs. It was really not until after World War II that Georgetown became a part of town people with a lot of money liked to invest, then beautify and enlarge their houses. That phenomenon, I would say, is one to two generations old.

In any event, my parents lived in Georgetown and Dad practiced law with Covington & Burling. He was made a partner in 1926, after he had been there just four to five years. He was a very gifted lawyer, a very gifted advocate. He possessed keen powers of analysis and keen powers of advocacy. One of his partners, John Lord O'Brian, told me — he was older than my father and had actually come to Washington as a lawyer under Theodore Roosevelt — David, I've known a lot of lawyers in my time, but I have never known any lawyer who had the combination of your father's powers of advocacy and analysis. I found that quite extraordinary — it never occurred to me until he said that. But when I was quite young, George Rublee, who was one of the founding partners of Covington & Burling, I asked him once — really when I was hardly more than a kid — I said, "Uncle George, what prompted your firm to bring my father in?" — his answer still sticks in my mind. He said, "He was the shiniest fish that ever came out of the sea." (both laugh) So anyway, Dad practiced law, and he did pretty much everything that the firm did — tax law, courtroom work. He did not do wills and estates, as I recall. He quickly picked up antitrust law and represented corporate clients who were being sued by the government under the antitrust law. And the DuPont Company was one of his major clients. He did very well, and I was struck later when I was old enough to think about these things, that during the depth of the Depression in 1931, my father greatly enlarged the house in Georgetown, and one would logically think probably at that time it was not all that costly to do that. But to

me it would always seem that the firm must have been doing really well during that time, seemed to have a practice one would call “depression-proof.”

My mother, of course, was painting during this time, traveling a bit, and painting where she traveled. I was quite impressed when I was a teenager. She had quite a number of exhibitions in Washington, and was showing oil paintings that were really very accomplished, rather large canvasses. She liked doing paintings of people in unrehearsed poses. She said — this would be politically incorrect today — “I made several paintings of colored people at the National Zoo.” She said, “It always struck me as fun to paint colored people, particularly the women, because their behinds stick out.” (both laugh) It is true from her paintings that it really gave her paintings character. Anyway, she was a very successful painter and had a very good time doing it.

MR. HAMROCK: Did you spend your summers in Washington, DC?

MR. ACHESON: Good question. We did not. In 1924 my parents bought a small farm in Maryland almost due north of Washington about 22 miles. The landmark, one would note today, would be the Olney Theater. It was about one mile east of the Olney Theater in a little Quaker community called Sandy Spring. It was a very attractive, very quiet, very orderly community run with Quaker values of modesty and industry and civility, and I had a very good time there. The farm was a pretty old building dating from the 18th Century, previously owned by the Stabler family. Their name, in fact, was inscribed in the bricks of the fireplace in the dining room with a date, 1792. So the house did need a lot of fixing up. When my parents first bought it, it was used only for summer residence, but later it was used for weekend residence year around. As a summer house it had no central heating. It had a rather primitive hot water system fueled by a kerosene heater. It had a circulating water system that was run by gasoline-

powered pumps that you had to start the way you started a Model T car. You had to crank a wheel that would fire the spark plugs and that would start the gasoline pump running and that would pump water into a tank, which was located in the upper part of the house so that the gravity would feed water into the taps. Basically, that was the water system that survived in that house the entire time my parents owned it, although, the gasoline pumps were later replaced by electric pumps. When my parents bought the house, there was no electric power in the house. The house was illuminated by kerosene lamps and flashlights. I have forgotten when the electricity was put in, but my recollection is probably not until after World War II. But the farm was great fun. It was located just south of the Quaker meeting house in Sandy Spring, and in a very protected area. There was nothing around it that was going to invade the territory of the farm. There were woods, there were fields of the neighboring farm, and at that time, nobody really thought seriously about development coming that far out into Montgomery County. The farm behind my father's farm was owned by a black family named Hill. Rather improbably the senior member of that family was an old man named Sam T. Hill. The expression, "what the Sam Hill," often occurs to the mind. He was a very engaging, very courteous, intelligent and industrious old man. He drove a carriage pulled by a horse. He had an enormous family. He had six sons who were all big strapping, strong young men, and very intelligent, and four or five daughters who were the same. So my father and mother never lacked for help when they went out there to live and occasionally they would invite people out for dinner and there was always people who could help cook and help serve. In the harvest time, my father was then growing at the farm the usual thing, timothy for hay, and corn, occasionally, wheat and clover. At harvest time the men of the Hill family would provide the crew, and we had a big wagon pulled by horses. We owned two large, strong work horses. They were not Clydesdale, but they were a

similar breed of workhorse that are heavy, very strong and quite docile. They would pull a wagon out in the fields and the bales of hay would be put on the wagon. We had a bailer which was powered by a gasoline engine so the bailing could be done on the place and the Hill boys could do all that themselves. We had a barn about the same age as the house that had a stone foundation going all around the first floor of the house. Within the stone foundation there were stalls for horses. In the upper part of the barn, which was then a large wooden structure, there was a loft to store the loose hay, and on the opposite side of the upper barn there was another loft where you could store bales of wheat, hay or whatever was baled. Years later, after World War II, the Hill family was dispersed at that point. They were all going, or often doing their own thing, or had their own families and jobs. Old Mr. Hill, Sam Hill, was dead, and my father leased his fields to a neighboring farmer and that made it easy for my father to keep the fields up and he got a little income from that. Enough to pay the taxes on the real estate taxes on the farm. One day, when he and my mother were away on vacation in the summer, the farmer, to whom the fields were leased, was running the baler in the barn, and it probably was not the smartest thing in the world to be running a gasoline power baler in the barn, but something happened and some hay dust, or hay on the floor caught fire from the baler. The entire barn burned down, leaving the stone foundation. My father initially thought this was a disaster. But then ,he remember that he had insured the barn, and it turned out that he had enough money from the insurance to build a studio for my mother around the stone foundation of the barn. (both laugh) So, the whole mishap turned out to be very favorable from my father's point of view. I said to him once, "Were there any problems with the insurance company about negligence, or whether there was really a valid claim for insurance?" He said, "The first fact was pretty basic. I was a long way off when the accident occurred." (laughs) So anyway, that was the way life went at the

farm. It was a very pleasant time for me. Even later, after the war when I was married, my wife and I and my kids would go out there and have Sunday lunch occasionally with my parents, when the weather was good, and sometimes when the weather was not that good.

To jump ahead and fast forward just a little bit. During the Truman administration, when my father was serving in Truman's cabinet as Secretary of State, he and Truman became quite close. That summer, and I forget the year, but it had to be between 1950 and 1953, because the Truman administration was gone by 1953. Mrs. Truman had gone out to Independence for the summer, she never liked Washington in the summer. So, Truman was alone in the White House, and my father invited him out to lunch one Sunday. Truman came out with a lot of Secret Service people and we had a great lunch outdoors on the lawn, on a very pleasant day. We took Truman down to the pool to swim. Years before, my father and mother did not have a pool when they bought the place. They discovered in an inclination down by the woods, there was a place where you could drill only 50 feet or so to hit an intake of water, which would yield almost a 100 gallons a minute, which was pretty good. The problem was the water was ice cold. It was spring water that had never seen the sun. My father use to call it the two-martini pool, said that you had to take a martini to get courage to go in, and you had to take another one to restart your heart when you came out. (both laugh) So Truman dove into the pool and when he came up, then he heard him yell, "Wow!" (both laugh) Then he said when they were climbing up the ladder, "I can think of at least five journalists I would like to see thrown in here." (both laugh)

We are now about the time when I graduated from Groton.

MR. HAMROCK: Would you care to take a break now before you move on to something else?

MR. ACHESON: I do not need one, but if you do, please.

MR. HAMROCK: Fair enough. No, no, we will go right ahead.

MR. ACHESON: I was a diligent student. I graduated from Groton second in my class *cum laude*, and I got the Groton School Greek prize, for Greek scholarship. I went to Yale, and my father, when I was talking to him about planning my courses, I knew pretty well what courses I wanted to take. I wanted to take German, which I studied at Groton and was good at, and liked. I wanted to take Greek. I wanted to take English Lit. I wanted to take science, which was required by Yale. So I opted geology, largely because my mother's younger brother was a professional geologist. There was an ROTC at Yale, both an Army ROTC and a Navy ROTC. My father said, "You know, there is going to be a war in which the United States will have to participate, and it may start while you are in college. My guess is it probably will, and I would urge you, therefore, to take one of the ROTCs, so that when you graduate you will have a commission in that service, and you will have a much better time and can be more useful with a commission if we should go to war." I thought that was very good advice, and I did. I took Naval ROTC, largely because I liked boats and sailing and stuff like that. (laugh)

Looking back, I would say Yale certainly was not the place then that it is now. More than that, I would say that the '20s and '30s had not changed Yale much. I think Yale, when I went there, was almost the Yale that existed after World War I. It was sort of still the raccoon coat kind of place where the emphasis was on athletics, and the social emphasis was on parties in New York, and dates on football weekends, and where scholarship did not rank very high on the list of things that brought you campus kudos. (laugh) I use to think later, it was probably too much to ask of the Yale administration, in those days, to have tried to change Yale into a more modern university with more emphasis on the sciences and more emphasis on the values of scholarship in undergraduate life because the whole country of which they were part was still, I

think, governed by the values of pre-World War I. So Yale was really an after-echo of a time that in reality was already gone. Of course, I did not realize that at the time I was there. But looking back it seems to be absolutely certain that that was the case. Charles Seymour, the President of Yale, had been a member of the faculty. It is striking that almost all of the presidents of Yale have come from the faculty, not from outside. You would have thought that that would have lent great emphasis on education values to the administration, but it never seemed to work that way until Whitney Griswold became President. Perhaps I should not say that because way back, when Timothy Dwight and Jonathan Edwards were presidents of Yale, certainly education, coupled with religion, were emphasized values. But in the raccoon coat days, education, I think, really suffered significantly. Seymour, although he was a famous history scholar and wrote a definitive book about the Versailles Peace Treaty, and was in fact, present at the Peace Treaty negotiations, was a very nice man. I do not think that he ever felt that Yale was somehow lagging in education. My father became a member of the Yale Corporation in 1936. He caught on almost immediately to the fact that Yale was not the place it should be in education, and he began pushing people on the faculty to push the administration to a greater emphasis on the sciences, research and advancement in education. His favorite instrument to do that on the faculty was Whitney Griswold, who was a professor of history and had written a PhD thesis on American foreign policy toward the far east. Whitney Griswold became my faculty advisor. He was on sabbatical or something, one year, and Tom Mendenhall was my faculty advisor. Tom also was a wonderful man and a very good scholar. He later became the President of Smith College. Whit was a very lively guy, interesting man with a very keen sense of humor, and he enjoyed social company. He had a very nice wife. He became one of my favorite faculty people, probably my most favorite faculty person. I will come back to

him later because toward the end of my time at Yale we were quite close and even after the war we became close again.

I went through Yale with pretty good grades, and succumbed like most of my friends, a little bit to the raccoon coat values. (laugh) I got my commission, when we graduated, in the Navy.

MR. HAMROCK: Can I ask you a question before you move on to the Navy? Just curious, because I do not remember, was Yale, at the time, a co-ed?

MR. ACHESON: No, no, good point. Yale was not co-ed while I was there. In fact, it did not become co-ed until my older son was there. He graduated in 1972 and it must have been about 1970 that Yale went co-ed.

MR. HAMROCK: Did you find that many of your Groton classmates went on with you to Yale?

MR. ACHESON: Yes, good question. Freshman year I roomed with two of my Groton classmates. Very nice people. Yale had the residential college system. Mr. Harkness, who owned the Harkness Oil Company, and had an immense oil fortune in the '20s and '30s, had so much money that he could endow and did endow both Harvard and Yale to build the residential college system. The Harvard houses and the Yale colleges were all the Harkness gift. Freshman year we all lived on the freshman campus, and I lived in Wright Hall, which was one of the newer buildings, did not date from the 18th Century (both laugh), and we had a triple suite. We had a very good time. One of our friends there, and I formed a little reading group and we — for some reason it stands out in my memory — we were reading together *Mutiny on the Bounty* and were assigned parts. So we would read along and in the dialogue, whoever had the part would speak the dialogue. My friend, George Stone, was Captain Bligh, and I, Fletcher

Christian. I've forgotten who the other parts were but there was a point in the book where the ward room mess is undergoing thefts of cheese. Captain Bligh has already formed a dislike to Fletcher Christian because Christian does not like the way Captain Bligh runs the ship and treats the crew. Captain Bligh's suspicion about the theft of cheese now falls on Fletcher Christian. I was reading the part — the dialogue part where the ward room mess cheese has been passed. The cheese comes to me and I say, "Thank you, no cheese." Captain Bligh then says, "No cheese Mr. Christian? It seems to me you were always very partial to cheese!" (both laughing) We had a lot of fun with this and we read some other things, but I've forgotten what they all were. I remember that George Stone sat behind me in English in Joseph Toy Curtis's English course, in which we wrote papers. We wrote papers for every class and he would then choose at random a paper to read from the papers submitted from that class. Then without identifying the author he would then invite comments and criticisms. That was supposed to educate us about critical values in English Lit. So one day he was reading my paper, and then he invited criticism. I got the usual kind of criticism, some people thought okay, some people thought very good, some people thought really badly wrong on this or that. Curtis ended that part of the class by saying — as he always did — addressing the anonymous author. He said, "Well, I would say to this author, there is a great deal in this paper that I find true, and a great deal that I find original, but I have to say, that which is true is not original, and that which is original is not true." (both laughing) So I cultivated a stone face. (laughing) Class is over and we go outside and George says to me, "That was your paper, wasn't it?" I said, "Yeah, how did you know?" (laughing) He said, "Your ears turned red." (both laughing hard) So anyway, I had a good time at Yale.

MR. HAMROCK: Did you find that your classmates at Yale — did you encounter them later in life as well?

MR. ACHESON: Some of my friends at Groton, including the two I roomed with, are still alive, and I still see them when, and if, we have a Groton reunion or gathering. I still stay in touch with them. Out of my 30 Groton classmates only five are still alive. Stuart Clement, a first cousin of George H. W. Bush, was a very close friend at Groton, and is probably the closest friend I still have from my Yale days, and Groton days. He became the class secretary of our Groton class, and then later he wanted to shift that to me and I took it on, so now I am class secretary. We do e-mail conversation still. Every year when I drive to Cape Cod, I stop with a cousin, a very smart lady who lives in Connecticut, and the Clements live close by, and we always get them over to come for drinks or dinner.

One of the friends I made at Yale was two years older than I. His name is Charles F. Spalding from Lake Forest, Illinois. He was on the Yale varsity tennis team, and he took time to coach me in tennis, and I use to play with him. Although he was considerably a better player than I was, he taught me some shots that I learned how to make to advance my tennis career at Yale (laugh), and which I still use. He was the most remarkable guy with a fantastic sense of humor. He was noted at Yale for bringing a football date to Yale for a weekend. Emerson Tuttle, who was the master at Davenport College, where I lived and where Chuck Spalding lived, put his date up so that she stayed with the Tuttle's in their house. He was taking her out that evening for a cocktail party, to fraternities and dinner and what not. She had omitted to bring her key to the house. So when they returned, after all these parties were over, the Tuttle's had gone to bed and she had no key. So the ever resourceful Chuck Spalding found that the front door of the Tuttle's house had a ledge over the front door and had alternating bricks that emerged from the wall that came down from the edge of the ledge. So he discovered that he could climb up brick by brick to the ledge then stand on the ledge, and there was a window, in

fact two windows right at the ledge level. He said to his date, "Do you remember the Tuttle's bedroom is on this side of the house, or the other side?" She said, "I remember, I'm on this side, and their bedroom is on the opposite side." Chuck said, "That's good, now I will see if I can open one of those windows." So he climbed up and stood on the ledge and, by God, one of the windows was unlocked. He opened the window, he took off his shoes in the room where he was after he got inside the house so that he would make no noise going down the stairs. He went down the stairs shoeless to the front door, opened the front door and let in his date (laugh), she found her bedroom and Chuck went back to recover his shoes, went out the front door, locked it behind him and this became a legendary escapade. (both laugh) Because he told the Tuttle's afterward what had happened, and they were flabbergasted, but thought it was very funny. (laugh) Chuck became, overnight, a campus hero with this original story to tell. Later he became a very close confidante of Jack Kennedy, and traveled with Jack during the campaign, As press reporters had it, he was the man chiefly in charge of finding girls for Jack Kennedy when they were on the road. (both laugh)

I remember that Chuck and I remained really quite good friends, and years later, a man here who has been on the board of a bank was on the nominating committee of that board. Chuck had been connected to some financial institution in Chicago. So my friend here got him put on the board of the bank here, and one day he called me up, a man named Charles Glover here. We were friends, and he said, "Dave would you have lunch with me? I've got a guest, he is Chuck Spalding, and he very much wants you to join us for lunch." So I did. I saw him, that was the only time I had seen Chuck face to face since Yale, and the last time. I have never seen him since then. But he wrote a famous book called *Love At First Flight*, about his training for naval aviation during the war. He and a friend named Otis Carney, who also came from Lake

Forest, were both cadets in the aviation training program of the Navy, and they took commissions and they were flyers during the Navy war. Their book was pretty hilarious. You probably could still get it on Amazon, online, because I'm sure there are copies — out of print copies available, as there are in almost every book.

Yale had ROTC. It was very interesting and I found it every bit as interesting as any of my other courses. I did pretty well in it. We had a lot of drills that were kind of pointless, but we did a lot of reading and naval technical stuff which was actually helpful. Later when I was gunnery officer on a Destroyer Escort in World War II, I remembered the first gunnery lesson we had at ROTC; there was something called the cold gun correction. That meant the first shot fired out of any gun at any time is going to be fired from a cold barrel and that will retard the combustion that occurs in the barrel when the shell is fired. That means the shell will not have the range that it would have after the first shots when the barrel then becomes hot. I thought, goddamn, that's really interesting! (both laugh)

The head of the ROTC at Yale was a Commander in the Navy named Wilder Baker, who later became the operations officer for Admiral Halsey, and the operations of the Third Fleet. Later when I was operating with the Third Fleet, I thought of him when the task force was in port once. I went aboard the flag ship to see if I could find Commander Baker, who was by that time a Rear Admiral. I was told that he was ashore and they didn't know where to find him. The only personal transaction I ever had with him really was in my junior year. I found a telegram on the door of my room at Davenport College. I was fearful that it was announcing the death of a member of my family or something. I tore it open and looked at it and it instructed me to report for duty to the Commandant of the Third Naval District of New York. I thought, God, that's odd! I wonder what that's all about? They could not be calling me to active duty because

— well, maybe they could — maybe everyone in ROTC is being called to active duty.” Well the way to find out was to walk over to the ROTC Headquarters and ask Commander Baker. He was kind enough to see me and I showed him the telegram, and he said, “As far as I know, nobody in this unit is being called up. I’m sure I would have heard about it. He said, “I cannot explain this! All I can do is, I can telephone down there to somebody. If it turns out that you are to report for some reason, you ought to be there. So maybe you ought to go down there and find out by yourself.” So I did. In New York they said, Your name is David Acheson, isn’t it? I said, “Yes.” I said, “I’m David C. Acheson.” He said, “That’s funny, there is no initial on there.” Then they said, Let me look at the file. So they had to go away for a long time, and look in some personnel file. The clerk brought back a sheaf of papers, and we went through those papers together, and it became apparent that I was not that guy. (laugh) He said, “You think there is somebody else with your name at Yale?” I said, “It seems most unlikely, but I suppose it is possible.” So we telephoned the Office of the Registrar at Yale, and we said could you look down the alphabetical list of everybody in the undergraduate school, everybody in the Sheffield Scientific School, which was the engineering undergraduate part of Yale. Curiously then they were separate from the academic side, which was supposed to be the humanities. They go down the list of the law school, the medical school, and the graduate school and see if there is anybody named David Acheson. This person said, “Oh God, that could take a long time!” I said to the person there, “Do you think I have to stay and report to somebody here?” “No, it’s clear that you are not this person. So, you ought to go back.” Meanwhile, they are going to call me back eventually when they get this information. I had a telephone at Yale in my room. A day later, I got a call from this guy in New York, and they said they had found a David Acheson in the graduate school at Yale. I said, “How great!” I took the telegram, scotched taped it to his door.

(both laugh) Later, if you can believe it, much later — years after the war, he turned out to be the husband of the woman who is my friend, whom I stay with when I drive north to the Cape. (both laugh) We became friends in later years. Largely because of the coincidence of the name, initially. Then it was discovered that our two family trees go back to some common point, although it was kind of hard to locate. One year, it probably was in the '60s, my wife and I had a dinner party for all the available Achesons. We had my sister, Mary Bundy, we had my other sister, Jane Acheson Brown, who came up from Florida, we had my mother, who was still alive in her 90s, I guess, we had this David Acheson of the Yale story, and his wife, come down and stay with us for the party, and most extraordinary Achesons, the British Achesons. They are the Earls of Gosford, and one of the daughters of the Earl of Gosford, Camilla, married a German named Axel von dem Bussche, who was a baron, which is big stuff in Germany. He is now dead — he was the only surviving member of the July 20 plot to kill Hitler.

MR. HAMROCK: Wow!

MR. ACHESON: He and his wife came to that dinner. So we had this extraordinary Acheson dinner party, at my apartment in Washington, catered. There was very fancy food, we had a great time, champagne and everything. Axel had a wooden leg. He lost his leg on the Russian Front when he was on the staff of the man known as the most brilliant German Commander, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein. Camilla had been married earlier to the brother of the leader of the July 20 plot. They were divorced during World War II and she was kicked out of the country, of course, being British, and went to Switzerland and became a volunteer worker in a hospital in Switzerland. After Axel had been wounded, his commanding officer knew that he was connected to the July 20 plot, and arranged to have him sent to a famous hospital in Switzerland that was good in prosthetics, because he had lost his leg. They falsified

his identity and got him out of Germany into Switzerland. It turned out to be the hospital where Camilla was working. (both laugh) So they met and were married after the war, or actually during the war, but in Switzerland. Axel was the bravest man that I ever knew. He was very tall and very handsome — sort of a classic, tall, German blond, good-looking guy. He was a major in the 9th Infantry and he was chosen to model a new uniform for Hitler to approve. He had been wounded again and had an arm in a sling, and this provided an excuse to have his tunic button over the arm and sling. So he had room inside the tunic for a belt of explosives to be fastened around his middle and a little battery powered switch that he was going to ignite from his pocket standing next to Hitler while Hitler admired the uniform. Axel said the RAF bombed the train that was bringing the uniform — the RAF did not know this, but they bombed the train that was bringing the uniform to Rastenberg for Hitler to see. So that meeting was called off.

MR. HAMROCK: Oh my.

MR. ACHESON: The next attempt they agreed was going to be von Stauffenberg's turn, Axel's friend and colleague. They had agreed each would not make two attempts in a row because they did not want suspicion to fall on them., and if any should be successful, of course, it would not be a repeat of that kind. (laugh) The second attempt after the misfiring of the uniform episode was to be Stauffenberg's. That was the bomb in the briefcase under the table. Field Marshal Manstein was never suspected or accused of complicity of the plot. Axel was also close to Field Marshal Rundstedt who, knew about the plot, but refuse to take any part in it. He was pretty sure that Manstein did not know about the plot until after it occurred, and then he suspected my cousin-in-law, Axel, was involved. But it is interesting that neither Rundstedt, nor Manstein was ever put before a People's Court for treason. Axel, being German, found it outrageous that Field Marshal Rommel, who had actually no connection with the plot — who

was ignorant of it, was forced to commit suicide after the plot, because of suspicion falling on him. (both laugh) Strange tale.

MR. HAMROCK: Oh my goodness, yes!

MR. ACHESON: Anyway, we got off the subject a little bit —

MR. HAMROCK: Would you care to take a short break?

MR. ACHESON: Yeah, we can take a break now.

MR. HAMROCK: We are back on.

MR. ACHESON: My class was accelerated at Yale, because of the war, so we graduated and got our commission on the same day, in December of 1942. My orders were to report to the Antisubmarine Training Center in Miami, Florida, at the Lykes Line Pier, in Miami. The Navy had set up an antisubmarine training center, and I reported there for what amounted to a two-month course. After that I was going to be assigned a vessel that presumably would conduct antisubmarine operations. I had a good friend at Yale who later was my wife's brother. We were very good friends and we decided to room together — he was also in the ROTC. So he got similar orders and we decided to room together down there. I found that place really interesting and I had enjoyed the work a lot. The courses were really interesting. They had a device that was very effective as a trainer, the Sangamon Attack Teacher. What it was, basically, was an electronic device that had a screen and the trainee, me in this case, was not permitted to look at the screen — stand off to the side. Then they had a device that had a compass — you had compass bearings you could choose — and they had a thing that simulated the ping of the electronic signal of sonar equipment. So the episode would start — here you are now, you are the captain of the ship on the con and you hear a ping, that's the echo off the submarine. You look at your compass and there is a little light that shows you the bearing, 90

degrees, 20 degrees, whatever it is on the compass, the bearing that you are hearing the ping from. So you give an order to the helmsman, heading right for the target of the ping. Then the trainer begins to maneuver the electronic submarine. He was changing course, changing speed, he was obviously trying to evade the attack. The ping continues and you see the ping changing bearings as the submarine is changing course and speed. So you counter that by saying, left to this or right to that bearing, and the idea is finally to be right on the target as you cross the path of the submarine where you then drop the depth charges and make a hit. I thought that was just so much damn fun! I really enjoyed it! (both laugh) I got to be pretty good at it too! (laugh) Unfortunately, conditions in real life were never like that.

After the eight-week course, I was assigned to a 110-foot wooden hulled subchaser, building on the ways in Delaware. So I went up there and met with the commanding officer assigned to this ship, and both of us were working with a contractor to finish the building of the ship and I was doing sort of clerical stuff on the paperwork of the building process — so was he really — and the contractor's people were all over the place. The head of the contractor's people was a very colorful, very interesting guy. A very smart guy and we got along famously and had a very good time. We went down to Miami for shakedown after the ship was finished, and there I saw my first Destroyer Escort, which was a new class. I thought, I want to get off of this wooden tub and get on a real ship. (laugh) So, I went in to apply for a transfer, and the head of personnel down there was looking for people to provide crews for these ships because there was a new class and they were trying to get them into action. I had asked the right questions and got right away assigned to a DE (Destroyer Escort) that was building in Philadelphia and was nearing completion. I thought, that's good, because I did not want to be sitting around a shipyard for a long time. This was September of '43. My first orders were to assemble a

skeleton crew and I had the names of the people on the skeleton crew — it really meant that I was going to be the watchdog to take these guys to the place that the crew was being trained in Norfolk. I got all of these guys together finally. We got train reservations and off we went to Norfolk. The train stopped — routine stop, station stop, in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, right on the Virginia, North Carolina, border, and there was a news hawk outside on the platform selling papers — this was in the evening — it was dark and they were selling papers. Some of the crew wondered if there was anything they could find to drink out here, but one of them brought in the paper, and big headlines in the paper “Marshal Badoglio’s Government in Italy Surrenders to Allies.” (laugh) Everybody thought the war was over. (both laugh) In no time all these guys were off the train looking for bars to celebrate. (both laugh) I had to get the conductor to hold the train until we got all of them rounded up and back on the train. Finally, we got them all together again and went on to Norfolk. At Norfolk we were met by the Shore Patrol who knew exactly where these guys were going to go for living quarters and all that, and they arranged it. I was sent to the Bachelor Officers’ Quarters and reported the next morning to the officer in charge of crew training in Norfolk. And there I met for the first time our Executive Officer. He was a very nice guy and also a graduate of Yale, and one of the world’s most outstanding amateur yachtsman. He was really very good. He was not only a very nice guy, but he was very competent. We became friends and we had a good crew training session. We had firing practice with the antiaircraft battery. We went to a place called Dam Neck, Virginia, where you shoot at targets being towed by aircraft for antiaircraft practice. They had a whole row of twenty millimeter machine guns mounted on concrete blocks and you step up to one and actually you shoot the damn thing. And taking care that you did not hit the plane by mistake. (both laugh) Believe me, the tow rope was very long. Then we had submarine training like they

did in Miami. We had a lot of drill on what to do at General Quarters, when you went into action, who did what, and the usual kind of thing. That was all done and we then brought the crew to Philadelphia aboard the ship. The ship was commissioned, so it became an active-duty vessel just after Christmas of 1943. Then we headed down the coast through the Panama Canal with a brief stop in Panama and out to the great Pacific.

MR. HAMROCK: You call that the name of the vessel?

MR. ACHESON: Yes. The vessel was the USS DE 217. It was named after an officer who was killed at Pearl Harbor named Coolbaugh. We were soon out over this ocean where you just go for days without seeing land, without seeing another ship, without seeing anything! — an occasional bird. I almost died laughing one day when — there were two black guys on the crew; in those days, crews were not racially integrated — but for some reason the stewards mates, who serve the officers' mess, who in the old Navy used to be Philippino by tradition, were now mainly blacks. These two black guys, they both came from Pittsburgh, were two of the three mess attendants who served the Officers' Quarters. They made the beds, they provided meals, and all of that. They cooked the meals, the Wardroom Mess Treasurers and Officers did the shopping and the organizing of the meals. These two black guys were standing at the rail one day just looking out over this endless expanse of light blue, grayish blue infinity and I actually stopped by these guys — I got to know them pretty well. I said, "Well how do you guys like the Pacific? One of them said, "Man, that's a heap of water out there!" The other one said, "Yeah, and we're just looking at the top of it!" (both laugh) That was an original observation. (laughing) We stopped at Pearl Harbor and I don't think we did much there except bring in new supplies and stuff That's not true, we had one gunnery training exercise where we fired at surface targets towed by a ship. It was kind of pointless because the main battery of the

Destroyer Escort then was a three-inch gun, one in the bow, and another in the stern. It was clear that a three-inch gun was pretty useless. First of all, we did not at that time have fire control radar. The capital ships did and they were later brought to destroyers, but never the DEs. In fire-control radar the motion of the ship is compensated by the radar, so the gun is constantly changing its aim for the motion of the ship. The gun is always on the target. We did not have fire-control radar, so it was clear in any sea, no matter how calm, you were going to have a gun platform that was moving, you were not going to be able to hit a damn thing with a three-inch cannon. The rate of fire from a three-inch gun was not fast enough. It was not an automatic weapon and you had to manually reload after every shot, so you did not have the kind of rate of fire that would enable you to change the aim as you were shooting. Almost immediately the main battery became a joke.

We had anti aircraft practice again in Pearl Harbor. Then we went off to the Southwest Pacific and ended up in French New Caledonia. It was far enough south to be out of the active battle zone with the Japanese. We arrived there in early 1944, well after the Battle of the Coral Sea against the Japanese where the U.S. lost an aircraft carrier and the Japanese did also, sort of a standoff. That was the first real blood against the Japanese Navy. We were then assigned to go to Manus Harbor in the Admiralty Islands, home port for the Seventh Fleet. The Seventh Fleet was part of the Southwest Pacific Area Command. General MacArthur was the theater Commander for the Southwest Pacific Area and all forces there — Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines — were under him. Admiral Nimitz was the Commander of the Pacific Ocean Area, north of the Southwest Pacific Area, and all forces there were answerable to him. This was the first time in the history of U.S. warfare that a joint command had been established with multi-services reporting to one Commander. It was so new that, in fact, the Navy hated it, and their

hatred was not mollified by General MacArthur's penchant for publicity. He became the pet hate of the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps.

The strategy was to leave Japanese bases behind, and they would then be encircled by U.S. forces and unable to really do anything. So you did not have to fight for every patch of real estate, and the whole idea was to be able to move along faster and save lives. We learned later that MacArthur had a reputation of being a very smart Commander and I did not know at that time, but at West Point, he had the highest grades in the history of West Point before or since. Our ship's part in the strategy was to be part of the antisubmarine escort for supply ships, troop ships, and for tankers that were going to reinforce forward bases, and to escort tankers that were fueling combat vessels at sea.

Fueling at sea was one of the most interesting activities. We would operate normally in a division of six ships. We would be assigned to escort tankers to a point in the ocean. When dawn came up the day you would arrive there, you would see this armada lined up in columns miles long all over the horizon. You would see a column of aircraft carriers, of battleships, of destroyers, of cruisers, all lined up and ahead of them several columns of large ocean-going oil tankers. Each ship would come up to the tanker ahead of its column, throw over lines and pull across large hoses that you would be attached to the fuel intake. Then they would start the pump and fuel the ship. The trick was to stay precisely on course with the tanker and precisely at the same speed of the tanker so that the hose was not subjected to any stress. That sounds easy but it was not because you make a change of five revolutions in the speed of the propeller and you are going to gain or lose speed. If a helmsman is not paying razor-sharp attention, he is going to wander off course a little bit and you do not want that either. When I was officer of the deck and had to stay right on course with the tanker, and right on speed with the tanker, believe me, if one

of the crew occasionally said, Mr. Acheson, can I bring you a cup of coffee? (laugh) I said, “I don’t have time to drink it.” (both laugh)

MR. HAMROCK: While at the same time worrying about potentially any other submarines in the area?

MR. ACHESON: Yeah, well always. Of course, we had a screen around the whole formation. When we were not fueling our ships, we were part of that screen. The funny thing is that the Japanese, correctly one can say, thought that the war was going to be a battle of aircraft carriers and battleships. Because it was going to be that kind of battle, ships of those classes were so fast that submarines would not be able to have any significant part in their actions. Submarines do not have that speed, and until the nuclear age, never were built to have that speed. The Japanese never really built a lot of up-to-date modern submarines. They had submarines and some of their submarines did some damage, but unlike the Germans, they never regarded submarine warfare as really a critical thing to be undertaken. Later when we were operating in the Philippine Archipelago, the islands make any transition of that archipelago a matter of threading through enclosed waters past islands and going through channels, a perfect opportunity for submarines to lie in one of those channels and wait for the inevitable traffic that had to go through. The Japanese did not do that and no one could ever figure out why not. Very interesting.

The *USS Indianapolis* that brought the atomic bomb to Tinian — remember, that was hit and sunk in mid-Pacific by a Japanese submarine with a horrible loss of crew and everything. The whole ship went down. A friend of mine was Commander of the DE that happened to run across the survivors of the crew and rescued them. That was just blind luck for the Japanese sub Commander to have a target out in midocean. In these enclosed waters in the Philippines, we

had plenty of contacts that we thought might be submarines. Only a couple of occasions where ships hit and sunk by subs in the Philippines, it is interesting.

The fueling at sea was great! We would then continue escorting vessels to various advanced bases. As the war went on the bases became more and more advanced into territory occupied by the Japanese. One day we were at our base when we changed the homeport of the Seventh Fleet to Humboldt Bay, on the north coast of New Guinea, up from Manus Harbor in the Admiralties. One day the captain said to me, “We’ve got orders to go over to an operations meeting. All Commanders and all communications officers at the Supreme Commander Headquarters.” The Supreme Commander Headquarters were at a beautiful big freshwater lake about five or six miles into the mountains from the coast, Lake Sentani. MacArthur had his headquarters there and his naval Commander was Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kincaid, who was a very competent officer and a notable gentleman. A really fine person, wonderful guy. He and I became friendly after the war. So we go to this briefing on the next operation, and it was conducted in the greatest secrecy. You had to show your ID, then you were given an assigned seat, and you were looking at this big stage. There were a couple of thousand people in the audience — communications officers. At the head of the stage, an elevated stage, this guy pulls down this huge map of the Philippines and takes a pointer right in the middle of Leyte Gulf — I said, “That’s where we are going?” (laugh) We were assigned to the attack force at Leyte Gulf which was divided into three task units. Each had a Seventh Fleet task unit number assigned to it. The task force was called Task Force 77, and the Task Units were composed of six DEs — each task unit had six DEs for escort, four converted aircraft carriers, that is carriers converted from fleet tanker that had a deck added, and each task unit had four of those carriers. There were three units and we were in the southern most of the three task units. We were operating with

four carriers, *USS Chenango*, *USS Suwanee*, *USS Santee* and another carrier. So off we went. The strategy here was that the carriers would provide air cover for the troop ships to cover the landing so that the landing would not be disrupted by air attacks. The striking force was the Third Fleet. They had the heavy carriers, heavy battleships and cruisers, and their job was to make sure that Leyte Gulf was safe. When you look at the Philippine Archipelago, you can see that Leyte on the east side of the archipelago could not be attacked by the Japanese except by air, or by ships that had to transit the San Bernardino Strait. The Third Fleet's job was to seal off the archipelago from the west so that no Japanese surface vessel could penetrate it and mess up the troop ships in the landing area. We arrived at this point and we started antisubmarine patrolling. The other two task units were out of sight just over the horizon to the north. We began patrolling for submarines and, by God, we got a contact! So we launched an attack on that contact dropping depth charges and everything. We did not see any wreckage, or anything coming up so we could not claim a hit and probably did not make any. While we were doing all of that, all of a sudden there was a loud explosion and one of the four carriers that was with us had been hit by a torpedo. They did their damage control exercise on that ship and prevented the ship from sinking. Then all the DEs were rushing around trying to find that submarine. Interestingly, nobody got another contact. But all of a sudden out of the clear blue sky came a swarm, not a big swarm, but like a dozen, Japanese fighter planes. We thought, God, that's funny. Everyone rushed to General Quarters. We got on the anti aircraft guns. Before anyone could do anything about it, two of these planes dived on one of the carriers, three thousand yards from us. The *Santee* took the first hit, hit twice by kamikazes. These were the very first kamikaze attacks in the Pacific war. No one had even imagined the kamikaze attacks until then. About two minutes later, one of the other four carriers, *Santee*, we were escorting was hit by

another kamikaze. Of course, a kamikaze attack on a carrier is devastating because, depending on where it comes from, it dives through the flight deck, what happens is you get an initial impact on the flight deck which spreads fire, and you have aircraft on the flight deck, you have fuel hoses on the flight deck, and the engine block normally penetrates to the hangar deck below where there are stored aircrafts, and that will start a fire with explosions on both decks and fire. A carrier is a floating magazine and a floating gas tank. So in no time on the *Santee* about 90 men were blown off the flight deck into the water and a number of others were killed in the hangar deck below. After the planes disappeared, we picked up out of the water all of these men, some of them had serious burn wounds which were very distressing to the victim and very distressing to the beholder because they are very painful and horrible looking wounds.

Our pharmacist and our cook prove to be a very interesting team. The pharmacist had tannic acid jelly that you put on burn wounds, but very quickly that was exhausted, with all of these people, because there were far more wounds than any crew of a Destroyer Escort would ever expect to have, but the cook realized that if you boil up a lot of tea you have tannic acid compresses — you have tea bags. Put in about 100 tea bags and boil them up and you have tannic acid, and you could cool it and put on the burn wounds. So we were all doing that and we were all busy as hell helping people who were on deck with wounds and getting them stuff to drink and bringing tea bags and all of that to dress their wounds. It was pretty chaotic, but several hours later it became clear that *Santee* was not going to sink.

A brief aside, one of the four DEs with us was called the *USS J. Douglas Blackwood*. It was part of our screen group in the same task unit. It was the only DE we encountered in the entire war that did not have Negro mess attendants. They had Philippino mess attendants. The *J. Douglas Blackwood* became quickly known in our task unit as the J. Blackless Dogwood.

(both laugh) It was part of our screen and it was picking up men out of the water. The Commander of our task unit was a rear admiral named Sprague, and he ordered our ship to escort *Santee* back to New Guinea for repairs because it had been hit and it had a rudder problem and had to go slowly and all kinds of hull damage, so we were going to have to take it back at about five knots to Humboldt Bay in New Guinea. Ideally, we would have had more than one escort to take the ship back in hostile waters, but they could not spare another escort. There was just too much action going on for the escorts that were there. We went back to New Guinea with this ship and so we missed the rest of the action. Before we had left the following had occurred: The night or two after the kamikaze attacks, I was in my bunk, off watch at night, and the radio man came down from the radio shack — I was communications officer — and he woke me up. He said, “Mr. Acheson, you better come up to the radio shack and look at this message that I think the Captain ought to see!” So I did. The message was from Com Seventh Fleet to CINCPAC (Admiral Nimitz) saying, Where is Task Force 34? That was Halsey’s force. That meant that Halsey was off station and the San Bernardino Strait was open to the Japanese Fleet. The same day we had reports from the Surigao Strait, south of Leyte, where a Japanese task force of heavy battleships, cruisers — the task force tried to come through there. Admiral Oldendorf, the American admiral that was in charge of all the old battleships that formed one task force (like *USS Maryland*, *USS New York*, *USS Texas*), he had them cover Surigao Strait. The Japanese capital ships came through one at a time in column, and Admiral Oldendorf did the classic crossing of the T maneuver, steamed his ships right across the Japanese column and destroyed each vessel in turn by gunfire. That’s what Nelson did at Trafalgar. (both laugh) It was just astonishing! So that told us that the Japanese were trying to penetrate the archipelago, and the radio message that I saw indicated that the northern opening, which was the San Bernardino

Strait, was now open. That put everybody in a panic. And to be sure, Admiral Kurita brought his capital ships through the San Bernardino Strait into the area just north of Leyte, just off the Island of Samar. (The battle now called the Battle of Leyte Gulf at that time was officially called the Battle of Samar.) Kurita expected to be in a gunfight with Halsey's ships. What he knew and what Halsey did not know was that the Japanese had a decoy force of empty aircraft carriers that had only skeleton crews and no planes steaming south from Taiwan to the Philippines that were designed to draw Halsey's force off station. They were the sacrifice force. So Kurita ends up with his force suddenly under attack by planes from Seventh Fleet planes, not Halsey's planes, but Admiral Kincaid's planes. Kurita did not know whose planes they were. So he did not know whether Halsey had been pulled off station or not. Meanwhile, he had a lot of surface targets, converted carriers, DEs, couple of destroyers. That puzzled him because he thought he was going to see capital ships against him. So they had a big shoot-out there in which a number of destroyers and DEs were sunk, and a couple of converted carriers were sunk, or damaged. But it was interesting because Kurita had ordered his forces to load ammunition with armor-piercing shells, believing he was going to be shooting at battleships and cruisers. Several of the carriers on our side and a couple of the DEs on our side experienced sixteen- and eight-inch shells going through the hull and out the other side without exploding because they had fuses built to be triggered only by the impact of battleship armor. (both laugh) It was really just astonishing! Kurita lost his nerve. He did not know that Halsey was off station.

Meanwhile, Halsey was up there and he encountered the decoy carriers and sank them all. Then he got word that Kurita's force was attacking the landings, turned around to come back, but he was way too late. Kurita, meanwhile, not knowing that he could be sure of going into the landing area and shooting up the troop ships because he did not know where Halsey's

force was, so he decided to get the hell out. He turned around and left and an American submarine actually sank his flagship on his way out through the San Bernardino Strait. His flagship was *HIJMS Yamato*, the largest battleship ever built in the history of the world with 18-inch guns. It could have been a formidable enemy, but it took a hit from a U.S. submarine and down it went. So Halsey is covered with embarrassment and he had sent all kinds of messages glorifying his victory over the decoy force. He never forgave Kincaid for his message that said “where is Task Force 34” because it reflected unfavorably on Halsey, but Kincaid was quite correct and Halsey was quite wrong. I was horrified later to learn that Kincaid retired with three stars as Vice Admiral, which he had all along. Halsey was the only officer, after the war was over, to be given a fifth star. I was just outraged!

Kincaid and I and our wives became friends. He and I belonged to a little eating club here called the “Alibi Club” where we would occasionally meet and have a drink. Whenever I saw him there, I always got a drink myself and said, “Tom, lets drink to the great glory of William F. Halsey.” He would laugh.

The rest of the war was sort of anticlimactic after Leyte Gulf. We kept escorting supply ships, tankers, carriers, and other ships to more and more northern and western bases. We were part of the Iwo Jima operation. We were part of the Lingayen Gulf operation where the task force went through the archipelago, and through the Sulu Sea, and up the west side of Luzon into the Lingayen Gulf. The MacArthur strategy was to attack the Japanese occupation force on Luzon from the west side as well as on the east side and trap them, prevent them from being reinforced and resupplied, and that worked out very well. There we did run into some submarine contact and a few attacks that never got any proof of a hit. Proof of a hit was very hard to get, because you have to see the wreckage coming up, or you have to see an explosion or something

on the surface. We never actually saw either one. Then the task got even harder to get credit for a hit because the Japanese would load a torpedo tube full of junk like life jackets, tin cans and stuff that would come to the surface and they would expel it from a torpedo tube while they were doing evasive maneuvers. They would hear a boom or a depth charge go off and then they would shoot this junk out of a torpedo tube and wreckage would come up with a big air bubble and the people on the attacking ship would say, Ah ha, got it!

We ended up the war in October of 1945. Of course, we were all electrified by the news of the atom bomb. That was great! We were quite sure that would make for a shorter war, which, in fact, it did. Shortly after that we were up in the north just east of Japan at the largest naval base in the history of naval warfare. Ulithi Atoll is a ring of coral that nearly encloses a body of salt water. In this case, the atoll was almost 30 miles in diameter and it was very deep and had several openings. The entire Third Fleet could moor in Ulithi Atoll with room to spare. There was an Officers' Club ashore of Ulithi called the Black Widow Club, named for the new class of night fighters, called the Black Widow, a night fighting, double-engine plane that had quiet water-cooled engines and could carry bombs and rockets and even torpedoes. Anyway, while we were in Ulithi, the Navy sent out a fleet broadcast about release to inactive duty, the war now being over with the Japanese and the Germans. Now the priority was to keep cost down. So they wanted to retire people who were not necessary for the war, and almost all of the reservists were no longer necessary. They had to keep some on duty because they had all of these ships, and before the ships could be retired they had to bring them in and then the crews could be retired. Meanwhile, they decided they could do with a skeleton crew on some ships. Before we went to Ulithi, we were assigned to go to several Japanese bases like Rabaul in New Britain, and Hainan off the coast of China, to determine whether there were Japanese forces

there who had not gotten the word about surrender. So we went to those places and we found, in a couple of cases, some Japanese, but they knew about surrender and they were only too glad to be taken off and put in prison camp for a while where they were interrogated by intelligence and then sent home.

All this meant that some U.S. personnel were getting personal relief orders, and the criteria were, if you were married and had been at sea for so long, and had combat duty, you would be the first to retire. I was married at that point. I had married in the States on May 1, 1943. I had been at sea almost continuously for two years. I had been in combat four times — our ship had — so I had four battle stars on my ribbons. While we were at Ulithi the commandant of the base sent a message boat out with relief orders for me personally, and several others. (This was my second DE, by the way, not the original DE, I was on. The second DE was a very pleasant experience also. I mean a good ship, good crew, good officers. I had a very good time.) So I was ordered to go ashore, report to the base Commander, and await transportation to the United States and relief and assignment to inactive duty. The base Commander was a Lieutenant Commander of the Navy. There had been a full captain in command at Ulithi, but he had been relieved, or going somewhere else that was more important to the Navy, maybe Yokosuka in Japan. The new base Commander had been the assistant commandant, and he was now the commandant. I went ashore and met him. I said first interest, of course, was to get transportation home. He said, “Well you know, I think I am going to get relief orders too.” He said, “What I am going to do is send a message to the Type Commander for the Destroyer Escorts in Yokosuka in Japan, and ask for them to send any U.S.-bound vessel past here to pick you and some others up to take you back. Also, to send vessels to pick up the remaining equipment and supplies for the base which no longer need to be there. He said, “You

know, we have several hundred cases of booze here. It is probably our solemn duty to try to consume as much as we can because it is all going to go back to be shipped home eventually.”

The empty bottles would be cheaper to move than full ones. (both laugh)

There are another half dozen of officers who were in my status at the base. We used to gather and have dinner at the base and cocktails pretty much every night while I was waiting for transportation home. You know, I really wanted to be useful so I said to the captain of my DE, “Sure I have been ordered to go ashore, if I can be helpful here the commandant can probably lend me back until you guys leave and if you guys leave before other transportation that I can get goes home, maybe I can go home with you .” So, I did that for a while between the base and my old ship. The commandant said, “You know this is really irregular, but he said, I am Reserve and you are Reserve, so who gives a damn?” When I first went into the Navy the joke was the admirable thing about the Navy system — this is the old Navy system — it is a system designed by geniuses to be run by idiots. In a sense it was true. The peace time Navy was a very small service. A very snobbish service. A very class conscious, race conscious, a very elite service in which actually social contacts were very important to advancement in all of that. To have that Navy suddenly show the ability to take thousands of Reserve enlisted men and commissioned ranks and turn them into useful members of a service in combat was just an extraordinary achievement. Of all of the things I felt about the war, the thing that I found the most extraordinary was that a small, selective service like the Navy could develop into this huge, expansive, effective ship building and training program. I thought it was just absolutely astounding! I still think so. Amazing!

MR. HAMROCK: I do not think you said, did you enter the war as a j.g.?

MR. ACHESON: No, as an Ensign.

MR. HAMROCK: As a Ensign. Okay.

MR. ACHESON: I went to inactive duty, but I did not separate from the Navy for some years. I remained a reservist. I would go down and do Reserve training just to keep my status up because I did not know whether I would have to go back for some reason. We were going to fight the Russians? Who knew? A few years later, I gave it up. But for a while I stayed in the Reserve. I even thought of staying in the Navy as a career, but my father's friend, Admiral Kirk (who commanded the D-Day Task Force, but because he was not a carrier admiral they retired him with three stars), said frankly to me after the war, he urged me not to think about the Navy as a career. He said what inevitably would happen is that the Navy appropriation would be cut sharply, personnel will be cut sharply, promotions will be cut sharply and it will take a lot longer to go from rank to rank. Your opportunity for distinguishing yourself will be shrunk because operations generally will be shrunk." He said, "It is a very poor time to consider going into the Navy as a career. Particularly being a reservist to the extent that the academy social connections, the Green Bowl and all of that have some influence and you do not have any of those factors for advancement." So he said, "I would not do it." I said, "Well, no one should know better than yourself. Thanks for your advice."

Then I decided to enter law school. Largely to see what would happen. I thought it would be a good thing to become a lawyer. I was not sure at all that I wanted to go into law.

MR. HAMROCK: I think at this point we may want to stop because my tape is about to run out.

MR. ACHESON: Okay, yeah let's do that. So we will begin again at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

MR. HAMROCK: We will begin in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on the next tape.

This is the end of Tape No. 1 of the Oral History of David Acheson.

MR. HAMROCK: This is an addition to Tape No. 1.

MR. ACHESON: A correction about the message Kincaid sent to Nimitz, "Where is Task Force 34?" It was actually sent by regular Navy practice encoded with what they call padding on the front and the end. The padding in Navy communications practice was designed to confuse the decoders on the enemy side by putting in words that had nothing to do with the substance of the message. The padding, in this case, read as follows: the front padding read, "Where, oh where." Then the substance read, "Where is Task Force 34?" The end padding read, "The world wants to know." (both laugh) It was the padding that particularly infuriated Halsey because he thought it was an effort to ridicule him (and might have been). (both laugh)