

DONALD ELLIOT ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

Biography

Donald Elliot was born in 1931, and lived in Ohio and Indiana before his family moved to Florida when he was six. Don had many relatives involved in the war effort, including his father, his half-brother, and his cousin, who was killed during the Battle of the Bulge. His father was called to work in bomb development at a plant in Indiana during World War II. He heard much of his war news from the radio, beginning with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on his way home from church. Don had planned on becoming an orthodontist, but after his Latin teacher asked him to stop associating with his best friend, a Japanese-American, he dropped the subject and changed his entire career plan.

Summary

Don recounts his memories of World War II, including stories about his relatives who served and German U-boats off the Florida coast. He speaks in depth about his best friend from childhood, how his friend’s family was forced into a Japanese American internment camp, and how the war impacted the family long-term.

Keywords

Ohio, Indiana, Florida, Japanese American internment, Navy, German U-boats, Battle of the Bulge, Pearl Harbor, black outs, school

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- 00:00 – Introductions and family background
- 02:05 – Childhood neighborhood, school life, and early jobs
- 07:12 – Early memories of the war and Pearl Harbor; half-brother being called by the Navy

Reserve

10:03 – How World War II affected daily life; cousin who was killed in the Battle of the Bulge; hearing news about the war

12:55 – Memories of Japanese American friend, who was interned in California; friend’s older brother translating Japanese for the military; how his Japanese friend changed his career path

17:36 – Expanding on cousin being killed in the Battle of the Bulge

20:00 – Initial conclusion; then remembers another story and discusses U-boats; covering headlights to reduce light pollution

23:22 – Daily life during the war, such as newspapers and rationing

25:56 – Father being called to work in bomb development for the military on a base in Indiana

28:02 – What he did for fun as a kid; final interview conclusion

STORIES TRANSCRIPT

Story 1: Japanese American Best Friend

[04:28 – 05:31]

GC: What was your school like?

It was a very good school: strict, required attention, and followed the rules. I had planned my life to be an orthodontist, and because our being in World War II, I was in my second year of Latin, which was required at that time by the school I had selected to go to. You had to have a college degree to write prescriptions as such and to attend their dental school. My Latin teacher called me in, and because my best friend in school was Japanese, she asked me to quit associating with him. And I dropped Latin, which changed my whole career plan.

Story 2: Half-brother’s Service in the Pacific

[07:12 – 09:11]

GC: Between 1939 and 1945 were you aware of the war?

Yes, very much so. I was on A1A December the 7th, which was Sunday, after church going to Delray to my brother’s. We were going to have a picnic. The car I was riding in was a Chrysler. I turned on the radio, and off came the announcement: Pearl Harbor has just been bombed. And my father made the statement, “Well, Gene will be gone in three weeks.” That was my half-brother. He was in the Navy Reserve and had been through basic training and accomplished all that, but was just a seaman then.

They did activate him three weeks later, only it was one day past what Pop said; it was on Monday. They didn't take 'em in on Sunday. It was the only way he missed it. [*laughs*] And he served as a Chief Petty Officer in the Seabees branch of the Navy, in the Pacific, building landing strips for wounded planes, eventually, that were shot at and hit and had to be landed on islands that were camouflaged. They had food and water there, Gene said. And all transmissions that he made, be it writing or anything, he could not tell his location for fear that the enemy would find out where we had locations in the Pacific.

Story 3: Background on Japanese American Best Friend [12:55 – 16:34]

GC: Do you want to expand on your friend that was Japanese?

He and his father came to the United States with the railroad building in Florida. Henry Flagler, who was the builder of the Florida East Coast Railroad, imported Japanese people to work as laborers. Eventually, when the railroad was completed, he gave them land between Delray and Boca Raton, and it was called Yāmato. And his father was the mayor of Yāmato. Now they refer to it as “Yamátó.” But it was spelt that way [Yāmato], so we picked up that. He grew up part of the time at Yāmato and he spoke fluent Japanese, as well as his brother, who was in the U.S. Army.

Most of the people from Yāmato were confiscated and shipped by railcar to concentration camps in California. His family, because—his brother was in the US Army and was pulled out of the medical corps, was put in the Pacific to listen in on all the Japanese broadcasts that went out to their ships and all, and thereby our military was informed of locations and things that gave us an edge on crippling their Navy. He had stories to tell. But they were all to be confiscated or blanked out and not told until the war was over.

GC: Do you remember what year they were sent to the concentration camps?

I do not. I really can't remember that, but we had very few. And they built a big, big airbase there called Boca Raton Airbase. Eventually that was known, before World War II, as the pineapple capital of Florida. And that was their main crop after they were dismissed by Henry Flagler and given the land. And Florida grew the best pineapples you'd ever want to eat. Not comparable to any we import today—they're picked so green. These were picked almost ripe and full of sugar.

GC: Do you remember how you felt when your friend was forced to move away?

He eventually moved to Fort Lauderdale, and that's how we became friends. Because of the war, they confiscated that land where they had lived. His father took up landscape and manicuring fine homes in the islands off of Fort Lauderdale, off of Los Olas Boulevard, and maintained them for public people who lived on those nice homes.