

**Martin C. Hartmann
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke
New York State Military Museum
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on February 7, 2011
Margaretville, New York**

Q: Would you please state your name, and date and place of birth?

MH: Martin Hartman, October seventeenth, 1921, Brooklyn, New York.

Q: Did you attend school in Brooklyn?

MH: Yes, until the eighth grade, and then after the war I got my diploma at Oxford.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

MH: Yes, [unclear] bar, in Brooklyn. We were drinking at the bar. We all went down and tried to enlist that night. They wouldn't take us. I drank too much!
[Laughs]

Q: So, you actually enlisted in the army?

MH: No, I was drafted. I didn't go back. They drafted me when I was twenty-one.

Q: What were you doing for a living prior to be drafted?

MH: I drove a truck for Pilgrim Landry. I also cooked for a German delicatessen in Brooklyn. Those were the only people I worked for before the service.

Q: What was the date you were drafted?

MH: August fifteenth, 1942.

Q: You went into the army?

MH: I went into the Army Air Corps.

Q: Where did you go for your basic training?

MH: We went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, and slept in a hotel for three months.
[Laughs]

Q: How was the training?

MH: Cook school, it was alright. I feel I forgot more than what I knew, when they got done with you.

Q: Did you go to cook school during basic or after?

MH: That was my basic, cook school. We fed 3000 men a meal down in Atlantic City. While we were at [unclear].

Q: Did you enjoy doing that?

MH: It was alright, I didn't mind because I like cooking. It didn't bother me any.

Q: Once you completed your basic at cook school where did they send you next?

MH: We were sent to Las Vegas, New Mexico. It was on top of some mountain where you could just about breathe, and we hated it. My two buddies and I wanted to get out of there. They put up a list for volunteers one day, so we all signed it and that was it. We ended up in Wisconsin, in an Arctic search and rescue outfit.

Q: What did they have you doing there?

MH: Learn to ski, drive dog teams, climb mountains. From there you would transfer to Houlton, Maine, for a year. That's where we climbed Mt. Katahdin, the third highest mountain in the United States. We stayed on top of the mountain for a month on just survival food, and we trained ten pilots while we were up there so if they were shot down they would know what to do.

Q: How many were in that unit?

MH: I'd say there were about thirty of us.

Q: And you were stationed on Houlton, Maine?

MH: Houlton, Maine. And we did nothing but train. We did no other jobs, we didn't do labor of any type. No KP or nothing. We had people who filled in for us.

Q: What did you do for entertainment?

MH: My two buddies and I happened to meet this couple, one of them was a civilian cook. We became very friendly. She did all our laundry for us and had us down there. We partied down there with them. I went back and visited them twice after the war. They were like family to me. They both died, unfortunately, and I've never went back there again.

Q: Do you recall their names?

MH: Hazel and Ed Fields in Houlton. Their children still live there, I keep in contact with their children.

Q: I had family in Bridgewater, which wasn't too far from Houlton.

MH: Bridgewater? Houlton used to be a dry town. We'd go over the border to Canada to buy beer, then come back with the beer and have a party. [Laughs].

Q: After Houlton where did you end up next?

MH: Outfit broke up after the Russians joined us. The reason we were in that outfit was in case the Russians came across where they're near touching us up in the Arctic, we were training for that. But the Russians joined us. They stopped fighting with the Germans and joined the Americans. The outfit broke up and we went to Syracuse, New York. We stayed there for a couple of months. I got in an argument with a ninety day wonder and I ended up the next day going to Texas for parachute school. Best thing they ever did because two months later they transferred them all to the infantry. The whole field. [Laughs]

Q: You said you went to parachute school, did you go to jump school or rigger school?

MH: Riggers. You had to learn how to sew the panels. If they were blowing the panels in the chute, you had to learn how to take the old ones out and sew new ones in.

Q: This was done with a regular sewing machine?

MH: Yes. Well, a big 9710 sewing machine, I think it was a Regal Sewing machine. You had to fit harnesses on people, you had to sew them in the right size otherwise they'd slip out. We had to go down to the field and check the parachutes that were on the planes, because sometimes our enemies would inject them with acid. They'd just take a needle and the panels would be all rotted.

Q: How long was that rigger's school?

MH: I'd say it was two to three months

Q: Did you get any kind of jump training?

MH: Yes, we did, for one day. They taught us how to roll, and fall, and land.

Q: But you didn't actually jump out of an airplane at that point?

MH: No, the day we graduated we packed our own parachutes and fit ourselves. Then they told us, "You're jumping today." We didn't know about it. One kid refused, he said, "I'm not going to go." They locked him up. [Laughs.]

Q: Being that you didn't go to a standard jump school, were you considered jump qualified? Did you get the parachutist's wings?

MH: I was qualified, but not with the 82nd airborne. We knew how to jump

Q: Were you issued the jump wings?

MH: No. The only other time I jumped was over in India, and that was just a demonstration for some people.

Q: How many total jumps did you make.

MH: Just two. That was enough. [Laughs.]

Q: Did you jump with the static line or free-fall?

MH: The static line, yes. They didn't trust us to pull our cord ourselves, we used the static line. If you didn't pull it, you went right down fast.

Q: Did you have a reserve parachute, also?

MH: Yes, you had an English Chest Chute. All you had to do was hit it and it would open up, but you had to put your hands over your face because the shroud line would come up and cut your face. Nobody wanted to use them, but it was an emergency chute.

Q: You ended up being sent to China, Burma, and India. When did that happen?

MH: Sometime in '44 we got on a ship in California and ended up in India thirty days later.

Q: Did you stop along the way anyplace?

MH: We stopped once, yes. We stopped for three days to refuel and get food in Hobart, Tasmania. It's a small island south of Australia. Very nice, the people there were wonderful to us.

Q: What was it like aboard ship for you? Did you get sea-sick at all?

MH: No, I didn't get sea-sick, but I was in the bottom hole. I volunteered for guard duty on top because I didn't want to be in the hole if we got hit.

Q: Did you travel in convoy or just a single ship?

MH: In a convoy, and it took thirty days to get to, Calcutta I think it was, India. From there we went to Chittagong, India, which is now a part of Pakistan, I believe. We stayed there for a few months.

Q: You were on an army air-force base?

MH: Yes.

Q: What kind of planes were they flying out of there?

MH: They were flying mostly cargo. We had some of the P41s come in for repairs every once in a while which we later found out were flying tigers.

Q: What was life like for you? What did your day consist of?

MH: We basically had movies, that was it.

Q: You didn't have a lot to do?

MH: No, and you didn't want to go to Chittagong town because that was supposed to be the most diseased place in the world. So I never hit the town. I hit it once when I went for ice. That was it.

Q: What were your living quarters like?

MH: We had [unclear], bamboo huts, which were nice huts. Long huts all made out of bamboo, no screens, no doors. They had the place for the windows but that was it.

Q: Any problems with snakes or anything like that?

MH: Not snakes, what was it? Not coyotes, but an animal similar to coyotes, like a fox. I had a mongoose for the king cobras. It hated king cobras. I had it tied up to my bunk. People would come get it when they spotted a cobra and they'd bring it up there and let the mongoose loose. He would circle that cobra until that cobra was dizzy. For hours! Two hours there'd be nothing but circling then all of a sudden he'd hit them, and kill them. They broke our outfit up, we had to pack up and leave. We drove onto the Burma road. We left from Ledo, India, and landed in, [unclear], China.

Q: Did you fly or drive?

MH: We drove the whole way. The whole Burma road. That was by General Stillwell.

Q: What was the road like? Was it pretty rough?

MH: Horrible. It's a dirt road, we lost one vehicle, a fire engine. Believe me, with the dual wheels you were just about on the ground, that's how narrow it was.

Q: Did the fire truck go over a cliff?

MH: Yes, you'd go over the cliff and right down. The Chinese people were not the best drivers in the world. Only one could pass at a time, you had to pull over to the side of the mountain to let them pass. They would barrel right past you, they had no sense on the speed. When we got to [unclear], China, that was where General Chennault and his flying tigers had flown out of. They had left quite a while before because the Japanese had surrounded the place so Chennault flew

them all out, and burned the place before he left.

Q: So you didn't take over their barracks or anything?

MH: There weren't any barracks left, we had tents. I think the only thing left was the mess hall. So we stayed there. The pilots, their job was to take the Chinese soldiers and transport them back to Taiwan because General Chennault wanted them there because the local Chinese soldiers were killing the communists. It went on for quite a while. The C47 pilots would take them back and forth to Taiwan. When that was over and we got them all out of there we were shipped to Shanghai.

Q: How did you get to Shanghai?

MH: We flew in to Shanghai. We were the second group there. The day before this other group got there. They had released General Doolittle's pilots. They had been imprisoned there and they rescued them out of that prison. Then the war was over, and the Cold War started.

Q: Were you ever under attack by the Japanese?

MH: Yes, we drove the Burma Road back. But we were ordered not to shoot back because the war was over.

Q: How were you attacked?

MH: They were in the forest. We were driving along the road and they started shooting at us.

Q: But you couldn't shoot back?

MH: They told us not to shoot back, but a couple of bullets went back that way. But they didn't know it was over, they didn't have any communication with Japan. Japan was almost demolished, the a-bomb, so they had no way of knowing that the war was over. So they shot at us. We didn't shoot that many back. We went on, there was a lot of equipment there, we burned it so the Chinese nationalists couldn't get it. We stayed there four or five months, until December fourty-five. Then we took a boat back to California. In about five, more than five years I was on the police department.

Q: So you were discharged in California?

MH: No, I went back to Fort Dix to be discharged. My wife had moved to Long Beach. I went to Fort Dix and they discharged us there. I stayed there and worked around the police department. I got a notice from another cop who was also in the CBI who told me General Chennault had issued the Chennault Victory Medal for all the guys who were there. All I had to do was write to the council in New

York City and give them the time, and I was sent the General Chennault Victory Medal. Then I stayed on for the rest of about 20 years then got off the police department and came upstate.

Q: You're retired from the police? New York City police?

MH: Nassau County. I've been retired fourty-one years. They've got a contract on me I think! [Laughs]

Q: Did you join ant Veteran's Organizations?

MH: Yes, I joined the Nassau County Police Legion. Then I transferred from that to the Roxbury.

Q: Are you a member of the VFW or the American Legion?

MH: No, we tried to start one in Roxbury but it just never floated. They just forgot about it. I keep getting letters from the VFW up in Stanford, but I don't know how to tell them I'm not a member.

Q: Did you stay in contact with any of the guys you were in the service with?

MH: Yes. Joe Mecina, the baker, he lived in Cleveland, I contacted him for quite a few years, then he died. Ralph Webb, a buddy of mine from India, he died, he was from Carlisle, PA. Then Bill Foster, he was a shopkeeper or an assistant shopkeeper. He stayed in the army and became sergeant of the air force. He looked like a zebra when they were done putting stripes on him. We met again in Georgia, they had a convention. I'm not sure if he died.

Q: Are you a member of the China Burma India association?

MH: I was, that's the [unclear]. I joined the one down in Kingston, but I had to drive at night and it was too much for me. I don't drive at night at all, so I just dropped out of it.

Q: How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

MH: It made me a better person, I think. I loved it. I wanted to stay in, my wife wouldn't let me. [Laughs]

Q: Were you married when you went into the service?

MH: No. I hurt my leg on a physical fitness test up in Houlton, Maine, running. You ran from one side of the hanger to the other, hit the door, and turned around. Well, I hit the door with one foot and the other foot didn't turn. I wound up with what they call a football knee, a severe contusion, or something, in the knee. I've still got the pump on the top of the knee. I tried to get my records, my records were burned out in the west. But they said they had found them finally. Some young lady had taken the quotas on people who were hurt, not shot or anything

like that, just hurt in the service, and they found them in her records. That's the only kind of hurt I ever got was in the knee.

Q: So you didn't have malaria or dengue fever or any of that?

MH: I had a touch of malaria while in Burma but it wasn't that bad. We had Atabrine, took that and it cured it. I never had any results coming back.

Q: So you brought some photographs.

MH: Yes [Holds up photographs].

Q: Now, the one in the parka, when and where was that taken?

MH: Houlton, Maine, I was in the Arctic search and rescue outfit.

Q: The other one where you're in the dress uniform?

MH: Parachute rigger, in [unclear], Texas.

Q: You were a technical corporal?

MH: In the beginning, yes.

Q: What rank were you when you were discharged?

MH: Sergeant.