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Interview with Col. Donald M. Ashbridge, retired from the United States Army and retired director of the Placement Bureau at the University of Delaware, July 28, 1966, by John H. Gauger.

Q This interview is with Col. Donald M. Ashbridge, retired from the United States Army and retired director of the Placement Bureau at the University of Delaware.

A That's right.

Q The interview was conducted on July 28, 1966, by John H. Gauger. Col. Ashbridge, where are you from originally?

A Philadelphia.

Q From Philadelphia? Had all your schooling in Philadelphia?

A Yeah.

Q How did you become interested in joining the Army?

A Pardon me?

Q How did you become interested in joining the Army?

A The day I was borned, I wanted to go in the Army. But I couldn't go to West Point because I had a bad eye. You see this thing here? Well, I had trouble with this left eye and it wasn't perfect . . . it was a good eye, but it wasn't perfect, and I never would have made the eye and I went to . . . I was . . . I got in when they weren't quite so cantankerous from [inaudible - sounds like "civil life"] and in 1909, and directly into Coast Artillery I was commissioned, a second lieutenant, 1909, April 1909. And I started in and I was stationed first at Fort DuPont and I went over there for about a week. Then I went to Fort Monroe to a school, see . . . there were 20 of us . . . they were short of officers . . . and I went down there to school and I went back to Fort DuPont after that school was over and I was there until the 1st of January, 1913 . . . nearly almost . . . not quite five years, four years and a half. And I went down to the Coast Artillery School at Fort Monroe. In the meantime, I'd become a first lieutenant, I think . . . yeah. And let's see . . . in the meantime I'd gone down to Galveston, Texas for a short period when they were having trouble with the Mexican people in Mexico. And I came back and I went down to . . .

Q You didn't go to Mexico, though, you just . . .

A No, I went as far as Galveston. And I got married . . . I was a first lieutenant and I went to Fort Monroe to school. From there . . . when that was over, I went to Jackson Barracks in New Orleans and from there I went to the First World War. And I came back and I was then a major. And I was then . . . am I talking loud enough for you to hear me?

Q Fine.

A And I . . . are you taking this down?

Q Yes.

A And I then was then . . . came back and the war was nearly over . . . practically over, and I was a member of . . . went to the Military Intelligence Division in the War Department where I remained for about oh, nearly four years, as I remember it. I had all kinds of jobs. And I went back to the advanced . . . what a minute . . . what they called the Advanced Coast Artillery School and I went back to the . . . let me see . . . what did they call . . . went back to the Military Intelligence Division for a month or two, and then I went to Leavenworth to school and I graduated high enough there to be selected to go to the War College. Now, I went from there . . . between my graduation there and the War College, I was at Fort Eustus, where I commanded two different ranks of its . . . one was 155 and GPF's and the other was . . . it was Railway Artillery . . . I don't remember the caliber of . . . and I went from there to the War College in Washington. And in those days you couldn't go any higher in the military echelon of education than the War College. And let's see, where did I go from there?

Q To the Philippines? Is that when you went to the Philippines?

A Yeah, I went to the Philippines. I went to the Philippines, where I was G3 and Chief of Staff of the Philippine Division. And I came back and I went up to Fort H. C. Wright. And I went from there to the Bureau of Insular Affairs in the War Department. And I came from there here. And I was here for approximately . . . 1930 I came here . . . I think it was 1930, or '31, I don't seem to remember. I was here about two years when I had a piece of bad luck and I was retired for having an operation. I had about four or five of 'em up 'til that time and I had got nearly . . . just short of 26 years service . . . see, I was retired. And I did nothing for about a year. And I met a man on the train one day from here who Mrs. Ashbridge knew and I knew passably. And he said, "Why don't you try to get a job helping the seniors get placed when they graduate?" Well, that appealed to me. This job I had in the War Department . . . I didn't go around and talk to cabinet ministers, but I went around and talked to people next to them, assistant cabinet ministers and asked to do this and they'd do that about things that were connected with the Philippines and Puerto Rico and the customs receivership of Santo Domingo--that was under the War Department then. And it was the best thing I could have done to come here and gotten this job as head of the Placement Bureau, because it gave me a little insight on how to approach people, you know. So I did a job for Dr. Hullihen, who was president of the place then and who has since long been dead. But it took his eye and I . . . this matter came up of organizing a placement bureau. And he said well, they'd laugh at me, the Board of Trustees. And I said . . . well, they wouldn't do anything of the kind. And so he brought the thing up at a Board of Trustees meeting and they finally decided that they'd

have a placement director. And on the 1st of January, 1936, I started in.

Q Weren't there too many colleges that had placement bureaus?

A Very few of 'em . . . very few . . . very few. And I admit that this is a grammatical . . . poor grammar to put it first, but I was . . . it was me who was head of the bureau, and one secretary who was supposed to be part-time, but wasn't. And she was Miss Carolyn Cobb at that time and she graduated here six months before and she . . . I guess she got more salary than I did. I got nothing, practically. And we started in. And I worked the thing up until I was called into active duty again on the 6th of December, 1940. That's when they had all this hullabaloo over the First World War [sic] . . . they called the officers back in and the enlisted men, too. And from then until January . . . 'til February 1st, 1946, I was on active duty. And I had nothing to do with this place. Then they released me . . . put me back on the retired list again. And I served until the 1st of July, 1952, when I resigned. I'd had enough of it and they'd had enough of me, too. That was 16 years I was in connection with this place as director of the Placement Bureau, minus the time I was in the Army. And it was really a very good job, very fine job. But it was terribly nerve-racking. Now I had gotten . . . I was 66 years old when I quit the thing on the 1st of July, 1952, and I'd put in a terrible lot of hours. I was up there many nights until 7:00 and I just couldn't go on any further. And I could have . . . the president of the place said to me, "Why don't you go on?" I said, "I can't do it." I said, "I'd better get out of here while the going's good instead of waiting for you to tell me to get out." And I went. And I have never regretted it. I served under four presidents up there and I got along with 'em all.

Q How did industry cooperate with you placing people?

A They cooperated about 95% . . . 95%. I had . . . I hate to tell you this, because it's blowing my own horn when I shouldn't do it, because I haven't got any right to. But I had many complimentary remarks made to me about this Placement Bureau. As you said, "You were one of the first people to start this," and I told you I was . . . start this Placement Bureau, and I said I was. There were very few of them. A few of the larger colleges had it, not many of them, but a few. And it was put under . . . in many cases . . . I say many, I mean many of the few that did have it, many of those . . . it was put under not an individual like me, but it was given as a secondary job to somebody in the Engineering Department of a college or somebody in the Arts and Science Department, and they ran it and then if somebody . . . if an industry came from outside . . . came there and let them know, let this man who was running the thing, let him know he was coming around and he'd tell around that . . . or put up a notice on the board that the fellow was coming and that was about the end of it. Well, I didn't do that. I went very far with it. And it worked out all right. But it was [inaudible] . . . but it worked and it shows and it got a very fine standing. And Mrs. . . .

Q Wyatt?

A Wyatt, she succeeded me. I recommended her highly for the job and she became quite prominent in the thing. She was . . . she was here four years before I resigned, and she became a good successor to me because she was all broken up . . . I mean well broken in. Now I forget the dates on this thing. I can't tell you the date. But we had . . . it was a man whose name I don't have any recollection of up at the University of Pennsylvania during the war, and he started a thing up there to get young people to go to . . . I don't know what it was called, but he had these young fellows go around and start in on . . . now, wait a minute. I'm just trying to remember what that thing was, and I can't do it. But he had a little organization up there at the University of Pennsylvania and it went along lines of education for people that were not fit to go to the war and so forth and finally when the war was over, he withdrew from the thing and the fellow that was in charge up there at Pennsylvania got me to . . . I don't know what he got me for, but he did . . . and got me to start something . . . an association of nine of these colleges which had been then . . . some of them had been . . . I'm trying to get the thing straight. We formed an association and called it the Nine Old Men, you see. Now, get this straight . . . I mean, I'm giving it to you enough so you've got it straight . . . and he called it the Nine Old Men. And they met down here for the first time and we had a meeting here and got thing underway. And I remember saying to this chap from the University of Pennsylvania, "Won't this fellow be sore that you're taking this off his hands?" He said, "No, he came to me and told me he was glad I was doing it." You see, they were both up there at Pennsylvania. So he was glad that it was being taken off his hands and we formed this thing called the Midatlantic Placement Officers Association. And we had a couple of meetings here and out at . . . after them at Lancaster and so forth, and we finally got the thing going, and we still were nine old men in this thing, and we were the backbone of it. There's my thing up there, you see that thing up there at the top?

Q Um hmm.

A And so it's a going concern now. It's a far-different thing now than it was then, because now they charge you . . . they charge members and everybody about \$25.00 to show up at one of the meetings. They didn't charge anything then. Maybe they charge 'em more for all I know. And they have a meeting a year and all that sort of thing. Well, Mrs. Wyatt became president of that thing one year. She was . . . took my place, you see, and she was getting along all right. And so I was very happy that she had, and she was a member of the executive committee and so forth before she was president. And all that all tied in. And I can't tell you any more that I know of.

Q I was wondering about this unit you trained here during World . . .

A This what?

Q The unit you trained during World War II--Army Specialized Training Unit?

A Army Specialized Training. Well, we didn't have that at first. It

was R.O.T.C.

Q Um hmm.

A I replaced a fellow that was here. He went on. You see, he was an active officer when he moved out of there and he remained so. And I took his place. And then they moved a number of . . . about 300, as I remember it, 300 people in this . . . formed this A.S.T.P. up . . . Army Specialized Training Program . . . brought 'em in here, and the professors who remained here acted as their instructors. Now, they brought the cream of the . . . they couldn't have . . . if they'd have hunted all over the Army, they couldn't . . . of course, they did this other places . . . but they couldn't have gotten any better people, no matter who they were . . . the cream of the crop came from the Army to this place and other places like it. And it was a damned outrage, to tell you the truth. Somebody with a lot of pull put the thing over in Washington . . . so they put the thing over and they formed these things up here . . . and there was about 30 to 40 R.O.T.C. which were not really fit to go to war, they were still carried on here as R.O.T.C., and I had these 300 other people. It got up to 600 one time.

Q Gee.

A And they had to live up to it, and I had an awful reputation of 'em, but it paid off because before the thing was over we had . . . I can't think of what that was called, either, but we had a thing that went on their arms here, showed . . . had a "excellent," and it was the only one granted in the whole Second Service Command, you see, which was three or four states around here. And I had about 30 of these organizations in this state . . . in this thing, and 30 units in different colleges, and this was the only place that got that distinction given to 'em. And people wondered why they ever let themselves be brought here, but I never saw such an esprit de corps on the part of anybody or on the part of any unit. And it was wonderful . . . wonderful. And they certainly lived up to it.

Q What was the purpose of the training?

A What?

Q The purpose of the training . . . was it . . .

A Well, it gave 'em an education . . . they were supposed to be officers after they got out of here, see. They were enlisted men when they came here and they were supposedly officer material when they left here. How many of 'em got to be officers, I never found out. I sent 'em all out to . . . I sent a great number of 'em out to the division out at Colorado . . . out at . . . what was that called, the 5th Division, I think it was. I don't remember the number of that either, but I packed 'em into a train and sent 'em out there . . . Camp somethin' out there. I was there after the war to see it.

Q Um hmm. Hmm.

A But I had no trouble with 'em. They all behaved themselves. They had to. I didn't stand for a bit of nonsense out of 'em, you see. They attended to their studies, worked like beavers. And they would want out of here on Saturday, a little bit after noon on pass until Sunday night. They were spooned up like brigadier generals. They really looked right, I'm telling you, they did. I had an inspection of 'em before they went out of here, down here to the train . . . the B&O Railroad was running then and they went down here and took the train that left at 2:40 or something and I never saw soldiers look better than they did. They really . . . they really were right. I had no trouble with 'em at all. They were the cream of the crop. But it was outrageous bringing here because they took 'em right out of divisions and brought 'em here and they wouldn't take any second-rate people out of 'em, you know . . . these division commanders were told to send the best that they had, and that's what they had to do. They wouldn't monkey with 'em, they just took the best that they had, and they were ready to go to France, some of those divisions. And they sent 'em here and other places, equal places, but this place . . . well, we didn't fool with 'em, that was all. Other places they didn't have the people that we did. The reason I couldn't go out in the field, I was about 50--some years old when this thing was going on and I wasn't in very good shape physically . . . I mean, I could do most anything, but I hadn't any business to do it.

Q Um hmm. Could we go back to your Philippine Island experience?

A Huh?

Q Could we go back to the Philippine Islands and see . . .

A If I lived to be 100 years old I couldn't have any more . . . better experience as a soldier than I had out there. That was wonderful. I was G3--that's the Operations Officer--of the Philippine Division and I was Chief of Staff of it. The Chief of Staff went away and through seniority I was . . . took his place. And it was all very fine and [inaudible] . . . job and I learned a great deal. And the commander of it was a very fine fellow--General . . . I don't remember his name, I can't think of it now. General . . . there were two of 'em, there was one of 'em particularly. We had war games and exercises and maneuvers out in the field.

Q Did you have any trouble with the Philippine natives while you were there?

A None at all.

Q They were all calmed down by then.

A Oh, this was long ago. They had no trouble with 'em. No trouble. No trouble whatever. They were all good soldiers . . . that was Filipinos . . . only one regiment was white people and the rest were all Filipinos and they behaved themselves and they were wonderful soldiers, and they showed it during the war. They fought like tigers. They fought like tigers . . . they were wonderful soldiers. I never

had any trouble with 'em. Two or three of 'em got drunk, that's all I ever saw any trouble with 'em. They were wonderful. And the best looking soldiers anybody ever saw. They were shined up . . . shined themselves up and never went out looking like bums or anything else.

Q Did you have any particularly interesting experiences there in the Philippines that you remember?

A No, I don't remember. I was on a destroyer for about two or three weeks. All I can remember is, I changed destroyers . . . I wanted to go into Hong Kong . . . I changed destroyers out in the middle of the China Sea . . . pitched and rolled a bit. I suppose I lived a colorful life, but you don't think anything of it, you forget it.

Q Um hmm.

A Now my life's nearly over and I forget about it, you see . . . those things just don't come back to you. You don't seem to remember. If I had my eyesight, I wouldn't mind.

Q How about the War College? What was that like when you went there? You said that was about the best . . .

A Well, it was the highest . . . it was just like going to a . . . you might call . . . it was like going to a Ph.D. course to any other college, that's what it was. I don't know as it was any different than that. It was . . . lots of work connected with it. It was a good school, very good. You learned a lot there. The thing was that you . . . it was principally small committees, you didn't do very much by yourself, but little committees maybe four or five, two or three or four or five people, and the committee worked things up. And then somebody on the committee got up and informed the whole class what the-- how it worked out, you see. I remember I got up four or five times in front of the whole class of about 100 and told them about what we had been doing. I don't know why it stays in my mind, but it does. I had the Military Intelligence Division because I had had some experience in that, and I was up on the platform one day, pointing towards the map on the wall, just with a pointer, and I was saying something and the lights all went out and the pointer was pointing towards the wall and I had no light for the map or anything else, which seemed to arouse the sense of the comic very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]