



NAVAL SURFACE WARFARE CENTER - DAHLGREN DIVISION (NSWCDD)  
**ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

---

**Ed Jones**

*Base Resident from 1948-1966*

**INTRO MUSIC**

**Introduction:** Welcome to the Dahlgren Centennial Celebration - A Century of Innovation. We hope that this and our many other products, events and offerings will showcase what Dahlgren has accomplished during its last 100 years.

Throughout our history, we've interviewed some of the most prominent minds, leaders and innovator that have been here, and we're opening up the vault to share them with you this year.

Today we are honored to listen to the story of Ed Jones, a former resident of Dahlgren, who lived on base from 1948 to 1966. He shares his perspective on living on base as well as attending Dahlgren School.

**Ed Jones:** I was born at a hospital in Richmond, but my parents were already living on the base. I was born in April 1948, and my folks Arthur and Virginia Jones had moved to the base in 1942. So shortly after my birth, I came back home to Dahlgren, and I spent the next eighteen years living on the base until I went to Harvard in the fall of 1966. And while I was away at college, wouldn't you know my parents moved off the base. That was nearing the time when almost all of the civilians ended up leaving the base, but while I was away at college, they moved to Argyle Heights near Fredericksburg. So, from 1948 to 1966, I spent the first eighteen years of my life living on the base.

**Sara Krechel:** What did your dad do on base?

**Ed Jones:** His training was as a physicist. Most of his career was in K Lab. He ended up being—he served a short time as Assistant Technical Director. He worked in K Lab very closely with Ralph Niemann. Jim Colvard has told me often that back in the 1970s—my father retired at the age of 51 after spending thirty years at Dahlgren, he retired in 1972, my mother thought he was kidding when he said, "I'm going to retire." But apparently there's some DNA in the Jones family that hasn't impacted me, but a lot of people in our family retire very early. So he retired at the age of 51, but according to Jim Colvard, who became Technical Director in the '70s, that my dad would've been the Technical Director if he had stayed, but maybe that was the reason he retired!

But he was ready to move on to other things, and my father ended up writing children's stories for the last thirty years of his life and being sort of a caregiver for our extended family. He wrote—this is someone who worked on all of these weapon systems while he was at Dahlgren, and he ended up writing for Jack and Jill, Boys' Life, Highlights. We were always cat people, I remember he wrote a piece called "Tabby in the Treetop," and when I was going through



*Interview completed on 26 September 2013*



his papers after he died about eleven years ago, there were fan letters from little kids about that article in Jack and Jill, “Tabby in the Treetop.” It so moved them that these little kids were writing my dad fan letters.

So like so many people at Dahlgren, he was a Renaissance man, and that sort of Renaissance man aspect of Dahlgren as a community was reflected in so many ways in the way the community was culturally self-sufficient. You know, this was a place that was steeped in science and technology but had a film society, had regular stops with Barter Theatre of Virginia would stop and give productions at Dahlgren. Just a very rich life living here as part of that community. Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Twin Cities, are often noted as communities that, for their size, are really culturally extraordinary because they have so many things that they have developed there on their own, and that—the same for Dahlgren. We were isolated as a community, we were in some ways an island, and so out of that came this sense that we got to build the whole community here. Everything from movies to theater to the rest of the things that go with a full-fledged community.

The thing about the base of course was everything was within one or two blocks. 8th tee was a block from our house, the school a block from the house, the bowling alley two blocks, swimming pool a block, you know, it was all there. My father—most of the mothers were not working; they were staying home, and my father, like most fathers came back to the house and there were three meals a day, all of – my two brothers and I and our parents got together three times a day for meals. It was that kind of a community.

Well, the thing about living at Dahlgren in the fifties and sixties like I did, the restricted area was truly the restricted area. I mean, I really know every square inch of this residential area on the base, but I would rarely get inside the fences, since it was fenced off, of the restricted area. We got there on Armed Forces Day, and you could go there to cut down Christmas trees in December on the base. Other than that though, I would rarely get inside the restricted areas. So, those of us who were dependents, other than what our parents, primarily fathers, would tell us, we knew very little of what was going on. We could hear a lot with the—that was the heyday of testing on the Main Range, but that became literally just a part of the rhythm of life. It’s like anything, you get used to it. We were very used to hearing that little warning whistle and a few seconds later the actual boom. We always looked forward to our visits from Aunt Katie from Richmond because when she came to visit us at Dahlgren, she always seemed to forget what that little warning whistle meant the first time, so the first boom she pretty much hit the floor. We were all just—my brothers and I were just waiting for that first boom to go off so Aunt Katie would go for the floor. But for us, I mean, the house would shake. We wouldn’t even notice.

People would visit and say, “What is that?” And we go, “What?”

It wouldn’t even interrupt your golf swing, you got used to it. You’d be out there swinging the club right in the middle of the boom.

When I graduated from Dahlgren School in 1962 after spending nine years there, Kindergarten through eighth grade, if you had asked me who was your favorite teacher then, probably last on my list would’ve been the sixth grade teacher Louise Dunnington. She was very strict, and we referred to it as Dunnington’s Dungeon Cell Six. And she lived in Bowling Green. Like many of the teachers there, she was unmarried. But as I think about it, and I’ve talked to other alumni over the years, as I think about the Dahlgren School education and the teachers, she may actually be the top of my list now because





even though she was not one to show any warmth, and she was quite strict, as I look back, I really respect what she did for us. She really did care about us. Even though we would be grumpy about it at the time, when we were out of line, she pretty much got us back in line. I think I probably learned more in sixth grade than any other grade because of Louise Dunnington.

But in no way am I slighting the other teachers. All of whom I remember like I was in their class yesterday from Miss Katra in Kindergarten all the way through Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Lancaster in seventh and eighth grades. Each one was distinctive. Each one made a mark that—gee, how many years later... Over a half century, I remember them all.

We were just talking at the Reunion Meeting about favorite teachers, and a couple of people mentioned their favorite would've been Louise Davies, who was the fourth grade teacher. She lived up near King George Courthouse. And she was very artistically inclined and she would begin the day with multi-colored chalk and would just create on the blackboard this absolutely beautiful artistic creation of the plan for the day with different colors of chalk, and it was just like an artistic masterpiece. That's how we began our day in fourth grade.

In third grade we had Miss White, I remember we studied a lot about American Indians in third grade, and at the time we attributed to the fact she owned a Pontiac car, you know, as in Pontiac Indians, and she got a lot of literature sent to her by the Pontiac Company, General Motors! So that might've been the reason we spent so much time on Americans Indians, but I remember each one of the teachers and as I think back now, the only ones that I know for sure are still with us are Ruth Smith, who taught seventh and eighth grade with Mrs. Lancaster, and Mrs. Clark, our fifth grade teacher who is now living down in Virginia Beach assisted living. I don't know that any of the others are still with us. I know for sure that many of them are no longer with us.

In our graduating class, we had maybe twenty-five students, something like that. Back in the day, as they say, in the fifties and the sixties at Dahlgren School, we were probably at the peak of enrollment—over three hundred students in the whole school. Now there might be slightly over one hundred. The reason that it's only a third as large, maybe a little less, the population of the base is decreased so dramatically, and now it's pretty much exclusively military, whereas in the fifties and the sixties, Dahlgren School was primarily civilian dependents. Probably about two-thirds of the students were civilian dependents and the other third were military.

But it says something about the school and the impact it had on not only our education but our lives that when we did the reunion two and a half years ago, and we're planning another one this coming fall, over two hundred people came to the reunion for grade school. I remember one of the ones who came, Terry Ney, whose father I believe was active Navy when they lived on the base and then he may have converted to civilian, but he lived on the base with his sister, Nancy. And he is a very well-respected judge [mail room bell rings] up in northern Virginia. I had not been in touch with him in decades, but I tracked him down and I called his office and the secretary answered the phone, and I said, "I'm calling Judge Ney about a school reunion." "Well the judge is in court right now, but I can get him to call you back. Now is this law school reunion? I said, "No." "Oh it's college." "No it's not college." "Oh, high school! How nice." "Grade school." And of course there was this pause, you know, she couldn't believe. She said, "Well I'll give him the message." About five minutes later I get a call from Terry Ney, "I'll be there." Sure enough he came! He was on one of our panels.





**Wayne Harman:** Well what did you do day-to-day as a youngster in the neighborhoods here?

**Ed Jones:** Although my family was not really all that involved with doing things on the water, a lot of other families were, and so there was a lot in the season that went on with water skiing, just out there in Williams Creek and Machodoc Creek, just doing a lot of water sports and things. There were, as I mentioned, all kinds of clubs and activities, including the Ham Radio Club. The Cub Scout / Boy Scout troops were very active here, golf course was just there for the taking and it was so easy to do, the swimming pool was a real community gathering place. There was no roof over it; it was just open air.

But that was where a lot of people came. The scout troops and a lot of other groups would meet at the community house, which is still there, the Doswell Community House. Movies were a big attraction as I was growing up in [terms of] things to do. I went to movies all the time. That's probably why in part of my career I became a film critic because of the number of movies I saw at Dahlgren. They were fifteen cents in my age, during the time I was here. That's how, when you meet people who lived here on the base, you can kind of gauge when they lived there by asking them how much the movies cost. Well I lived in the fifteen cent age on the base, and that would've been the fifties. I did the math once because they brought in as a re-release *Gone with the Wind* I remember, and I think that's 222 minutes long, and it was fifteen cents. And I did the math and it was one heck of a deal, I'll tell you that. So those are the activities that I can think of, plus with the environment around here, you know I lived at 764 Caffee Road for most of my life here, and you could just... My father had a big garden in back of the house, across the alley we had a grapevine, he made some wine, we had an asparagus patch, and it was just walking across the field to your right down there at the boat dock and on the water, and there were little trails along the waters. I mean, in terms of just being out and about, we kids would often camp out overnight in various places on the base. I remember we, Speight Overman and I, camped out once next to the seventh green and overslept and almost got hit by the first golfer of the day. There were things going on all the time. We never felt like we were just standing around saying, "What are we going to do here?"

**Wayne Harman:** Well what was the name of the some of the kids that you hung out with? Are they still around?

**Ed Jones:** John Glancy is no longer with us. He was the athletic star at Dahlgren School, and he and I were together for nine years all the way through Dahlgren School. He went to King George High School, and I ended up going to James Monroe [High School]. He was killed back in the eighties I believe by a drunk driver out in California where he had established a business. But John was really an outstanding athlete and just such a very decent guy that all of us in that class remember him so well. His older brother Paul has Paul's Bakery. So John Glancy—

Speight Overman was my best friend. He was the son of Harold and Ilma Overman, and he lived on Hall Road. I lived right at the end of Hall Road on Caffee Road. Speight and I ended up— when I was in law school and when Speight was in graduate school at the University of Virginia, we roomed together. He was the best man at my wedding to Peggy. So Speight was really a close person.

Ronnie Hughes. Ronnie Hughes was one of my best friends. His house is no longer there. It was on Sampson Road near Dahlgren Road. He now lives in the Pittsburgh area. His father, I think it was David Hughes, was the longtime Sunday school teacher on the base.





The chapel was an integral part of our life on the base. I was an acolyte and did other things there, and we had perfect attendance pins that we would wear for Sunday school. You had people who had... military decorations all through World War II or something, just go all the way down, but it was just—seemed like everybody went to church on Sunday morning at the chapel. There was Catholic service and a Protestant service, and of course the altar is still there on a swivel platform that I called sort of a lazy Susan altar with Protestant on one side, Catholic on the other and Jewish in between. I still remember that Sunday when I was an acolyte, lighting the candles. One of my jobs was to make sure that the swivel altar was secured before the service started, and of course it was that one Sunday I had failed to do that. And I was standing up near the altar and the chaplain actually got on the swivel to do a prayer, and he bowed his head, and as he did, I noticed that thing began moving slowly. I guess his motion had somehow gotten it going, and I had visions of his having a long prayer, turning, and looking around, there was nobody there!

Nobody there! He would be on the other side! And, “Where did everybody go?” Or in between would be even worse! But it stopped. But that was one of my scarier moments, but it was interesting because every three years we’d get a different chaplain. I’m an Episcopalian now; back then I was just a Protestant. We never had an Episcopal chaplain, probably because St. Paul’s was so close to the base, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. But we had Methodist, Lutheran...

One of my military friends, Debbie Forsythe, was the daughter of the chaplain. She was there for three years. She was one of my sweethearts early on. Another one was Kathy Highberger. Her brother Ted also went to Dahlgren School. Kathy is now in British Columbia. I think she got into library work.

But the interesting thing about the students at Dahlgren School in the sixties, back then, of course there was no high school on the base then. There was a high school on the base in the thirties, but not when I was going in the fifties and sixties, so most everybody went to King George High School, which I did my freshman year. But back then, the gap between the county schools and the city school, James Monroe, was so big that a group of parents on the base got together and decided that they were going to charter their own school bus to take the kids from Dahlgren to James Monroe High School, thirty miles away. And so, not all the kids on the base did, but about fifteen to twenty of us did. Every morning, right there at 764 Caffee Road, sometimes one bus would come first, sometimes the other, but the King George County school bus would come through and pick up kids, and then our school bus, our charter bus, would come through on its way to Fredericksburg to go to James Monroe. So I went to James Monroe my last three years along with the other Dahlgren students. And to this day, it amazes me that those students who were already at James Monroe didn’t chase us out of the school because we Dahlgren kids had received such a great education at Dahlgren School, we threw the whole curve off. The whole academic curve off! We got bused in, we won all the academic awards, you know, valedictorian, salutatorian, everything. These kids from Dahlgren. I mean if I had been one of the James Monroe kids, I would’ve been going, “Who are these people? They’re being bused in; they’re winning all of the awards. Go home!” But to their credit, they were very open and embracing of us, but that’s... I commuted sixty miles a day to the high school the last three years I was living on base.

I got very involved with the whole James Monroe community. I got very active in the school. I was the president of the student government. I was foreign exchange student during the summer to Pakistan. I got really involved in James Monroe. I was on the debate team there. So it wasn’t that









I started working at the Free Lance Star, and here it is 48 years later, I'm about to move on. My career there actually goes back to my living at Dahlgren days.

If you stay there that long enough, you almost get it by default. You've done everything else, so they've got to figure out what else, "Ok, be editor now." It's been a great—I talk about how fortunate I was to grow up in a place like Dahlgren, but then I have to add what are the odds that I would find in what became my hometown of Fredericksburg a family-owned newspaper of quality that would allow me to spend 48 years there. I mean, what are the odds of that? One in a billion are basically the odds! So now, not only did I have the benefit of growing up at Dahlgren, but I had the benefit of going to a family-owned company that really cared about employees and offered tremendous opportunity. So if I've turned out bad for any reason, I have no excuses. Because I got every break you can imagine. When my parents were around, so many of the Dahlgren parents were just so totally supportive of the children. Always—never pressuring me, but always supporting me.

**Wayne Harman:** Did you ever just kind of dream at night about moving somewhere else in the world to live? Or you stayed in Fredericksburg a long time.

**Ed Jones:** Right. Well I actually got to the point—this would maybe be twelve/thirteen years ago—I received the latest of a number of job offers that I'd receive over the years from much larger papers. And this was a large paper in Texas. The publisher had—my wife Peggy and I were flown out, wined and dined, showed us some residential areas, big increase in salary, big increase in circulation for the paper from what I was used to, big editorial page editor. I came back, and I asked Peggy, "What do you think?" And she said, "When do I start packing? This is... You don't even have to think about this. Of course!" And boy was that ever turmoil for me because I really had to wrestle with that as I had to with some of the earlier offers. I finally remember after about two days of agony, because I felt like realistically of course you would take this job, I went back to Peggy, and I said, "You know what I've discovered here? I've discovered that I am a Fredericksburg area guy in journalism. I'm not a journalist who happens to be living in Fredericksburg. My roots are too deep here. My experience with this paper, small though it might be compared to this other one, is really what nurtures me." To her credit, she said, "Well fine."

So I was... I struggled with that. And as I look back, I am so happy that I did not leave. I am very happy with the decisions we made to stay. Now, I'm starting a whole new career. I feel like a giddy freshman. I'm five weeks away from being ordained as a deacon. I'll probably be working with the bishop. I feel like I'm starting a whole new career, and, in some ways, I look at it as if I've had a 48 year internship at the Free Lance Star to decide what it is I wanted to focus on and now

What I'm anticipating next is spending pretty much full time work in the church but continuing my commitment to the Dahlgren Museum, which is something I certainly completely believe in, and I think we're making progress in establishing... That is going to be plenty. That's going to fill up my time. It's going to fill it up quite well. So that's really this next chapter that I'm looking at.

**Sara Krechel:** So you obviously still have a big connection to Dahlgren and the Dahlgren community, so what was it about living here then that made you so passionate about it?

**Ed Jones:** Well essentially, I have one, now and I had one then, but there was this huge gap where it seemed to have very little connection. I mean there were decades that went by after I left Dahlgren









was in what we called Terrytown, which was all the residential area that was not Boomtown. I also remember growing up, in my early years I remember living on Third Street in Boomtown. There were four streets in Boomtown. Third Street is close as I've been able to map it, it's right out—right next to the AEGIS Training and Readiness Center building is where Third Street—

--Third Street would have been. Right over there. There were four streets in Boomtown. During my parents' time on the base, they lived on each of those four streets at one time or another. The really nice thing would be when you had been here long enough where you could move to Boomtown over to Terrytown, were the houses were larger and the yards were... So, we ended up moving to 764 Caffee Road, still standing. I remember my father got a... I think it was the house that [Donald] Stoner lived in for a number of years, but at some point he got the option. "You can move from where you are, 764 Caffee Road, to Stoner's house," which is one of the stucco houses on Sampson Road that's bigger." He and my mother decided they didn't want to move. We were very much nested into that house, which is right there on Sampson Circle where the big tree that was decorated for Christmas would be. Just two blocks, two houses down was Mr. Barker, who had the largest garden in town. He... Across the alley from his Caffee Road house was this incredibly large garden. And four o'clock was when the whistle blew and everybody came home from work, and he'd be out there in his garden, day after day after day. Also living on Caffee Circle was Dr. Charles Cohen and his daughter Elissa and I were, in many ways, best buddies for many years. Also, for awhile living on that street was Dr. William A. Kemper.

Both Dr. Cohen and Dr. Kemper were born in 1911, so if they were still with us, they'd be approaching 102. Of course Dr. Cohen—they both died within the last five or six years. But Dr. Kemper was known as "Uncle Bill." He was for most of his life a bachelor, and he adopted the kids in town. And so Uncle Bill would take us over to Old Rag Mountain, near Skyline Drive, and we'd go hiking Old Rag Mountain or Uncle Bill would take us to some other outing. When we all ever had science projects, we always went to Uncle Bill to—he would help us out with it and all that. It was that kind of community, you know, "Uncle Bill" would take the kids to Old Rag. It was that kind of thing.

I also remember Armido Didonato who retired here just a year or two ago?

I think he may have retired. But he's been here forever; he's in his eighties!

**Wayne Harman:** They didn't have the years of service pins with a big enough number, so they had to give him two!

**Ed Jones:** That's right!

[Laughs]

**Wayne Harman:** So they added up to the right number.

**Ed Jones:** He lived on Hall Road next to the Overmans. I do remember for some reason he had a little neighborhood argument with, I think a lieutenant who lived on Gilmore Road which is no longer there. It's where those townhouses are now. And so what they decided, well let's just take it over to the gym, and they just go on the boxing gloves and worked it out that way. Yeah the gym is still there. That's where... When we were going to Dahlgren School, all the basketball stuff and all that would be over there at the gym. Now there's a gym actually at the school. Back then





you had to go across the park to the gym.

**Sara Krechel:** What was the difference between the two towns you mentioned? Terrytown and Boomtown?

**Ed Jones:** Well, Boomtown was strictly those four streets of clustered housing over there where the AEGIS Readiness and Training Center is now. In fact, I think it's still—that road that goes in there to them might still be called Third Street, I don't know. But there are athletic fields, you drive, then there's ATRC, where that was you had the four streets, and there were—some of them were duplexes and some of them were apartments. Some of that housing actually got moved off the base. As you're coming in Dahlgren Road, on your left as you're coming in there's Palivoda Drive, and back there are some of the original Boomtown houses that are there they were moved off the base. Boomtown was built to be short term. During the war, when a lot of extra effort was needed, they needed more residential, well Boomtown stayed a lot longer than the war.

Terrytown was everything else. And of course many of the houses in Terrytown have been torn down. One side of Hall Road is gone now for the children's center on Sampson Road as you're coming in all those bungalows were torn down. I understand why because they don't really serve the purpose the way they used to, but remember some of these bungalows, which were floated down from Indian Head would probably be close to 100 years old now. And still in remarkably good shape. They just don't seem as custom-built for the present generation as they would've been for us because at 764 Caffee Road, there were actually two bedrooms, and then just a little TV room, but we turned it into a third bedroom, and we had one bathroom. And we had three boys and my parents; there were five of us. There was one bathroom and two bedrooms and we converted another room to a third. And oddly you just get used to it. We never felt crowded. My brother and I shared a bedroom. And, you know, it's just what you're used to. There was no air conditioning, but you still got the fans and put them in the windows.

I'm sure there will be other things that will occur to me that I'll wish I would've told you, but I'm not thinking of anything right now. The chapel, the school, the swimming pool, the golf course, they were all so much a part of life here. I do remember that—it was interesting the way the civilians and the military mixed. The only real difference among my friends would be well, the military kids would only be here three years, and the civilians would be here forever.

For instance, at the movie theater, they may still do this, but on the—they were showing them by reels, film reels. And they would tag on "The Star Spangled Banner" [played] and everybody [stood up], and I remember by brother once was not respectful enough during "The Star Spangled Banner," and one of the military officers who happened to be in there came down and really set him straight on that.

And I also remember the time that it used to be the sailors that lived on the base would be the projectionist, and for whatever reason they got the reels mixed up one night. I can't remember what the film was so the movie just sort of started, and I thought, "Whoa, maybe we just missed the beginning of the something. The movie's starting." And then about thirty minutes into it, the first reel comes on, well that had "The Star Spangled Banner" on it, so thirty minutes into the film, everybody stood up and did "The Star Spangled Banner" and sat back down and watched the first reel.

No, I can't really think of anything else... I just... I realize it's not possible to create a community





like that really easily these days, but... because the people who would make up the base now live all over the area. I mean, Wayne is one of them. He would've been one of these people living on the base for his career, if you would've been in my father's era. You would've been part of that community, now you live over near Fredericksburg as many of the people that work here do. And you're part of a different sort of community. And that's fine, but when we all lived here together and worked here, it was very different. I do miss it. I never felt so embraced by the community as I did when I was growing up here. I just felt like—when you talk about coming home, you really felt like you were coming home. It was that tight-knit a community.

And a lot of people don't realize that Dahlgren is one of the exceptions, or used to be one of the exceptions to that. And that's why we get so wrapped up in the history of Dahlgren, partly. There are all kinds of technical things, and they're sort of the important part of it. But the community part of it is very interesting because of it. I can't think of anything else right now, but thank you!

**Conclusion:** Thank you for listening to this week's Dahlgren Centennial Podcast, and hopefully you have learned another interesting aspect of what our people accomplish for the Navy and our nation.

We will continue sharing how Dahlgren is a one-of-a-kind location where innovation is heralded as the hallmark of each individual.

Tune in next week to hear from Rear Admiral Boynton Braun, an aviation officer who first came to Dahlgren in 1929.

Thank you for celebrating this century of innovation with us at Dahlgren.

**CLOSING MUSIC**

