

Earl Bach

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Question: Let me get your first and last name so I have the correct spelling on tape.

Answer: Okay, my first name is Earl --

Question: Okay.

Answer: And the last name is Beach -- like it had a "Y" in the middle of it. Like Bach, the musician.

Question: B-A-C-H.

Answer: C-H. Yeah. We're supposed to be English family.

Question: I was going to say, is that --

Answer: Got to be English. It's an old, old English family. I guess we can go back about 200 years within the family.

Question: Wow.

Question: Now you -- when did you get into the Service?

Answer: I went in in '42. Second of September of 1942.

Question: '42. How did you decide -- did you call them or they called you?

Answer: Oh, I took some tests. I was going to college, over at Ellensburg, Central Washington at that time. And then I didn't want to be a -- well, hell, guys I had -- I had flown -- done some flying over there. What they called civilian pilot training. And then, hell, I didn't want to be a foot soldier, what the hell, I liked flying so damn much -- well, I'd always been fascinated with flying. And apparently I was a good enough flyer that my instructor said you know, told me, if you've got to go in the Service, you should be a pilot. So I took the test at McChord Field and the results were good and then they swore me in second of July of '42 and then said now, we'll let you know when we want you to report. So that was 2nd of September of '42. And then I think they let me know on -- what the heck was it? Must have been the -- either last day of August or first of September, I had to quit my job at the college and get a plane out of SeaTac -- yeah, out of SeaTac. No, it wasn't SeaTac, it was Boeing Field.

Question: Oh, really.

Answer: Boeing Field and then from Boeing Field, why on down to Los Angeles. I think made stops along the way. I think Portland and Frisco and --

Question: And you went -- you signed up at Army Air Corps?

Answer: Yeah, Army Air Corps.

Question: So you're an Army -- Army soldier.

Answer: And then from there -- that was Santa Anna, Californi

Answer: They had a big old Army truck picking us up. Hell, about 9 o'clock at night I think it was. Took us out to the base. And a bunch more tests there and then I was going to

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be a navigator because of my eyesight. I -- there's a dot and a line and if you watch it long enough, why then the iris -- eyes would get tired and the line would start moving, and I didn't know what it meant so I told them -- I tell them, you know, and well, we think you better be a navigator. Okay, and sent down by troop train -- there was 130, 140 of us went on a troop train to Houston, Texas. Got down there and hell, they claimed they'd never heard of us, didn't know we were coming. But we were supposed to go to Rice University. And so then they gave us a chance to be reclassified if we wanted to try. And hell, yes, I knew about the dot and the line then, and hell, I passed that with flying colors. And so there -- from there I went up to San Antonio. And there was another aviation cadet center. And from there, why they sent 200 of us up to Sikeston, Missouri. And then I can remember the CO coming out, he said, well, take a good -- they had us all lined up there. And "take a good look at the fellows alongside of you cause", he says, "when this class is over, why the guys on either side of you are going to be gone. They'll only be about -- only be about 70 of you that will go on in the Air Force." I was one of the 70. We went down to Independence, Kansas and then from Independence, Kansas, why then we went to advance flight school down at Mission, Texas. And from there, why then we got our wings and went overseas to Honolulu and 19th Fighter Squadron. Stayed with them then all the time that I was overseas.

Question: So did you fly out of Honolulu, then or did you actually --

Answer: Well, we flew into Honolulu on -- no, wait a minute, I'll take it back now. We didn't fly into Honolulu, we went by a repair ship from San Diego to Honolulu and then they had us all, so and so, and a bunch of us, we'd put our papers together at Mission, Texas. I think there was 12 of us. And almost all of us stayed together and went into the same squadron together. They went right on down the line, A's and B's and C's. Arnold was my buddy and Bach and, let's see, Angeal and Anderson, and anyway, there was -- A's, B's, and C's. We all stayed together and then the D's and E's and F's -- and the rest of them, why they went to different places in the Hawaiian Islands.

Question: Now you were pretty young at this time? Right, you're --

Answer: Well, let's see, I was born in '20 so I would be -- that was '40 -- probably '43, so I'd be 23 then.

Question: Twenty-three, okay. So you're old enough to vote and drink --

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: Full -- full American citizen.

Answer: Well, I wasn't thinking about that, but I think we did our share along the line. Well, what the hell, that's -- everybody did it -- not everybody, no I'll take it back, but almost everybody. Didn't smoke, no, I could never see any sense to it.

Question: Huh. Boy, that's real rare, when you talk about the World War II people, I mean there were a lot of smokers at that time.

Answer: Yeah, oh, yeah, yeah.

Question: If they didn't smoke, they-- they took the cigarettes so they could trade them.

Answer: Yeah, well, when we were in a forward combat area, out on Saipan, well, any time we'd go to the mess hall, there'd be a Red Cross, either a man or a woman, usually, lots

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of times it was a gal. She'd have free -- free cigarettes for the guys. And hell, I'd walk right on by. Hey, don't do that. If you don't want the pack, get one for me. Okay, what the hell, I'd -- so, I you know, gave -- pick up the packs if the guys wanted them. But I don't know, I -- I could never see any sense to it. I had a prof at college there in Central Washington and he was, I don't know what the class was or anything, but he was telling about some of his athletes. Well, I was a track man. I did quite a bit of running, half mile and mile. I was lucky. I won a lot of races. But he was talking about -- well, he was a basketball coach and he was talking about some of these fellows and he was telling us about smoking. Well, he says, he said I don't know a lot about smoking cigarettes because, he says, I've never been a smoker. But I've noticed on some of my players, that especially the bigger guys, when they first came to the college and maybe on a scholarship -- then was a job. You could work for -- for the college at 30 cents an hour. That was the only scholarships they gave away at that time. That would be in '39 and '40 and '41. And he said I've noticed that the guys get tired quicker and they've got to rest a little bit longer. You know, some of those guys, when they first came in as freshmen, why they could play an entire game without having to sit down and rest. Then he said I noticed that after they became acclimated to the college and had buddies in the college and they became smokers, too, why he said, I noticed that they tired out quicker. And I thought, well, hell, I don't need that if I'm going to be a track man. You know, you're doing your best to try to win the ball game anyway -- or I mean race anyway.

Question: That's why you're doing so good now.

Answer: I think it's probably a lot of it.

Question: Now, you ended up at Tinian or Saipan -- which --

Answer: Oh, Saipan.

Question: Saipan, yeah.

Answer: We were never on Tinian. I mean, the only thing over Tinian, why we flew over Tinian, a lot of our missions.

Question: Now you had kind of an interesting experience getting to Saipan it sounds like.

Answer: Off of a carrier, yeah, catapult, yeah.

Question: Cause you were Army, right? And the Army didn't necessarily set you up for that.

Answer: Oh, no, no, no. We were just one way shot. (laughs) And they -- they told us now if you have any problems, and don't think you can make it into the island, why, get to the side, don't get in the line where the carrier's going cause he's headed in -- directly into the wind. And bail out. Either bail out or -- but we knew damn well that P-47s were so damn heavy that it would sink like a rock. And so they said you get out on the side and bail out and we'll pick you up or have some other -- cause we had three destroyers for escort.

Question: So that was your first catapult launch?

Answer: Oh, yeah, first and last. (laughs)

Question: So what was that like, do you remember?

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Answer: Yeah, oh, yeah. They told us beforehand what to expect, and they said when you're ready to go, and they, you know, what they do is you're up in back end of the catapult, and they got a cable that runs between a hook on each landing gear, just kind of a little hook, run the cable from here, over to this side, and then there's a ring -- or a -- a stake, sticking up from that -- that -- well, the track where you're going down the catapult. It's a big stick, sticks up about like so. And -- and they said what you do is run your engine wide open. Get everything wide open, everything is okay, why then go like this (gestures) to cut your throat, and then you hold your hand here and then stand here against your stick so the stick won't come back. Otherwise, why you'll be taking off that way. (Gestures) And this here, of course your throttle, make sure that all the controls stay forward. When you do that (gestures), why put your head back against the back rest -- they said if you don't put it back that way -- but you go from nothing to 60 miles an hour in -- well, less than a foot. So that's a hell of a jerk there.

Question: I would imagine.

Answer: Yeah. That's the reason why you want to be sure you have your head back.

Question: So did most of the guys make it then or did --

Answer: Oh, yeah, there was nobody. Well, some of the guys in the Navy, oh, geez, those planes are so damn heavy they won't -- they were betting. They tell me these Navy guys were betting. Oh hell, I'll bet that guy don't make it, or I bet there's five of them don't make it, or something like that. But now there was only 16 of us flew in that day because the Japanese -- the Marines had taken a strip and the Japanese re-took it, I think the next day. I'm guessing invasion day was the 15th, and I am guessing about the 18th or so, why the Marines got up to the air strip. They took the strip, and then the Japanese re-took it, probably the 19th. And then the Marines took it the second time and that was probably about the 20th. And then the Japanese retook it, probably the 21st, I'm guessing.

Question: So back and forth.

Question: And then the third time, why then the Army 27th Division took it and that was probably on the 22nd, I'm guessing, and then they catapulted us off the carrier, come on in, but so they only let 16 of us go in, just in case the Japanese retook it a third time. We could -- I don't know where the hell we'd have landed then.

Question: So did you fly in -- against -- did you have fire coming at you when you were coming in?

Answer: Around the point, Nafutan Point, there's a -- well, if you remember on that map there's a Magigienne Bay, and on the corner of it -- on the -- would be southeast corner of the island, there was some Japanese isolated out there, and they were shooting at us. We had to circle around and then come on in and land.

Question: Did they have any weaponry of any size or --

Answer: They had some big guns, but they -- they couldn't train them on us because we were moving so fast. And one of the big guns, I've probably guess probably about a five inch shell. Now that -- it came out of Singapore. Where the Japanese -- after the Japanese had taken Singapore, why then they moved it out there to Saipan. Now why -- I don't ever remember seeing that gun being fired, but I know that maybe machine guns, stuff like that. But they -- no, it was the 22nd, we flew in on the 26th. That was my birthday, the 26th of

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June. I was the first American airdrome officer on the island of Saipan. And that's the night the Japanese come out of the point there. Any of the guys out there that were wounded, couldn't come with them, why they shot them. The Japanese killed them before they left.

Question: Really.

Answer: They didn't want to take any -- have any prisoners taken, I guess. But I'm guessing maybe 300 men came out, and they come out along the airstrip, and they'd take a bayonet and slice the belly tank on the plane and get back always and throw a hand grenade out there. I think there was one plane, two planes burned. But here, they were against -- the flames, you know of course the guys standing up there. So then our guys on the other side of the field were shooting at them. And so I guess they only did that for just a couple of planes and then they -- well, hell, well, hell, you can imagine, the flames right in back of you, Christ, sticking out like a sore thumb.

Question: Hmm. So they were -- and they were kind of doing the Kamikaze attack on your planes --

Answer: Yeah, yeah. And then they -- a few of them got through. I would say probably not over half a dozen or a dozen. And then, well, like I said, first American airdrome officer. I got on the telephone, the guys had a mission to take off early, something like that. I couldn't raise anybody down -- we'd taken over an old Japanese barracks. That's where everybody was sleeping. And nobody there. Or didn't answer the phone, I thought maybe their phone line had been cut. And when it got just about right at daylight, why I thought, well, I better go down and find out what the hell's going on and tell them they got a flight at such and such a time. I -- somewhere, why there was somebody that was in trouble, and they wanted somebody down there to take care of the Japanese. But I got about half way down there and I heard halt, halt, halt. And so I stopped. Turn off your lights. Well, they didn't -- what's the password, and I told them and guys came over and talked. Well, they said, there's some Japanese up here, just a little ways. We've been waiting trying to get them, and they said -- I told them what I had to do, I had to go down to the squadron area, it's only, Christ, half a mile I suppose altogether. And I was about half there. And they said, well, if you got to go down there, go ahead and we'll try to cover you, but you better -- what the hell did they do -- I don't remember whether -- I think they told me to turn my headlights off. So the Japanese wouldn't be shooting at me. But anyway, I went on down, nobody there. And then I went across the street to go over to an observation squadron, bunch of Navy pilots. And these observation planes, and I said where the hell the guys at? Oh, they marched out of here a little while ago, they went west and then circled around the south and they came back to the field. So I told them what I was supposed to do, call them, and they said well, hell, just call up the headquarters, we'd taken over an old Japanese, oh, I suppose you'd call it a tower. Concrete building. And call up there then and the guys were there then. And the guys said, well you might as well stay here with us at least till after it gets daylight. In the meantime why the Marines hunted down those Japanese, the few snipers that were left. But I stayed with those guys then and visited with them for a little while. And then, no need to go back to your quarters, or you can stay there, whatever you want. So I think I probably took a nap, I'd been awake all night. But that's all that was, hell, it didn't amount to a hell of a lot.

Question: What's it like when you pulled up there and they said, halt, halt, halt, I mean, it almost sounds like you're describing somebody out pheasant hunting, you know, quiet, there's a pheasant out here --

Answer: Yeah, well, it isn't -- well, if I hadn't halted, why there'd have been open fire; they'd probably figured I was Japanese. So --

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Question: So you would have got like friendly fire.

Answer: Oh, yeah. So when they say halt, halt, halt, you'd better halt, Bud.

Question: Well what about when you then continue on, they go, well, you know, there's some Japanese --

Answer: Oh, no, no, no. I -- the only reason why I went ahead is they said go ahead, we'll cover you.

Question: But don't you still -- do you figure, hey, these guys are good and I don't have to worry about anything?

Answer: Oh, no, well, no, you still don't know because you knew damn well there was still some Japanese around. They hadn't killed them yet.

Question: Huh.

Answer: But you got to go down there, tell the guys, because, hell, that was -- that's what I was supposed to do. I couldn't get them on the telephone; I didn't know where the hell they were at. I had no idea in the world where they were at.

Question: That's kind of an interesting aspect of war, I mean you mentioned a couple times the communication.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: It seems to be a real challenge, because you know, you've got people moving here and there and you got passwords changing and --

Answer: Well, the only thing is, there isn't that many guys, see, I was probably the only jeep maybe they'd seen there for, well, hours probably. Because at night like that, why you don't move around too damn much. Except the guys on patrol that are probably working together. You know, the Marines, I'm sure they had radio communication between them.

Question: Huh.

Question: So what was your task -- what -- what did they -- now, you flew which plane? What type of plane?

Answer: Thunderbolt.

Question: Thunderbolt.

Answer: Yeah, B-47.

Question: And was that -- and I saw a picture of you standing by one called the Mugwump -- was that yours or --

Answer: Yeah, yeah, that was my plane.

Question: So who -- did you name it or did somebody --

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Answer: No, I named it, yeah.

Question: You did?

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: Now, how did you pick the Mugwump?

Answer: Well, I'd -- I'd -- to me it wasn't a beautiful plane. And all the guys had pictures of gals and women and things like that and I couldn't think of any gal that would be suitable. I knew several gals, but I didn't -- and I thought, oh, hell, to me it's more like a bird with a god damn ugly bird sitting on the fence mug one way and the wump the other.

Question: Huh.

Answer: But hell, a lot of guys had beautiful pictures, you know, or women -- one of our guys in our squadron, a Petty, Mel Petty, now he had a half brother but he was also -- they were both artists, damn good ones. Now if you really remember back, you've probably seen photos of World War II where the Petty girls, you remember that? Well, he was one of two twin brothers that --

Question: Oh, really?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Wow. Now did you -- you had guns and did you -- tor.. torpedo bombs on those or what --

Answer: No, no, no, no torpedo -- we carried -- well, it depended upon the flight. Now, some flights they wanted us strictly strafing. In other words, if there's Japanese troops there, why, strafe. That's better than dropping bombs. But if there's any buildings or anything like that, why we sometimes carry bombs and sometimes strafe, also. So what we'd do is -- well, say for instance, there's a building there they want knocked out. Or maybe, well, say for instance, better yet, big guns firing on, well, like on opening day -- not opening day, what the hell am I thinking? Invasion day of Tinian. Now off of the west coast of Tinian, right at daylight, why there was three big guns there. They were firing on the USS Colorado, set it on fire. And so they, right at daylight, when they called us, wanted eight planes to go down there, two 500 pound bombs each, and knock those guns out because the guys were having a hell of a time fighting the fire and trying to duck shells from that damn gun, there were three guns. So we went down, and hell, we could see the belch of fire when they were firing the guns. Christ, big old belch of smoke going up about like that. Christ, must have went a hundred feet in the air.

Question: Wow.

Answer: And so then, hell, shows us just exactly where the hell they were at. So then first time around, why each guy would take his turn and dive bomb -- dive on down and what you do is, you get your -- say the gunner's position is here and what you do is get all ready and get your -- ready for your release and then here and then when you -- when that gun position goes out of sight, the front -- front part of your cowl, just -- just -- well, last of the metal on the nose, when that goes out of sight, why then release your bombs because you're -- and then follow your path and get on -- climbing on out and get the hell out of there. And

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then the next guy, he comes on in. Well, we dropped a bomb apiece in, first time around, and I suppose by that time, why the Japanese had got the hell away from the guns -- if we didn't hit the guns, at least they got the hell out of there so we wouldn't be hitting them with a bomb. And then the next time around, the other -- seven guys ahead of me, why they dropped their bombs, and I was the last guy, and there were about three or four gun -- machine gun positions, open fire on the guy ahead of me. So I call the flight leader, and I say, hey, is it all right if I go down and knock out one of the machine gun positions. Sure, go ahead. And so then I dove down and rather than on the big guns, I dove on down and hell, I picked out one and started firing at me. So, Christ, he's shooting here, all you do is -- don't take any brains to figure that out. Get in position, get him in the gun sight, and boom, eight guns, and fire until he quits firing, and then fly back up, and the other guys -- now the flight leader -- there's a half dozen guys open fire on me. And so he picked out one of them and went down and flying back up and we just went around and around and around until they quit shooting at us. And then a few days later when the Marines went through there, why, they gave us credit for knocking out 35 machine gun positions. That's twin guns. And 70 guns then altogether. Hell, they advanced along the coast there, it seemed to me like they said for over a mile without -- without a shot being fired at them.

Question: So the - the -- when you did the big guns, you dropped bombs. Did you drop bombs on the machine guns or did you strafe them?

Answer: Oh, no, no, no. It was all strictly strafing.

Question: Wow.

Answer: But hell, there was eight guns, and each gun held, what do they figure, 400 rounds a minute. And you just pepper the hell out of everything right around there. And then each -- each gun -- you have it sighted in say, 300 yards. That's what I had mine set for. But with the vibration of the wing and everything, why the guns are hitting all around that little are

Answer: None of them hit exactly the same spot. And so you pepper that whole damn area there. And if anybody's there, they -- they don't shoot at you anymore.

Question: So you're a big, kind of a bird shot, basically?

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: -- I mean it --

Answer: Oh, yeah, with eight guns, you can imagine --

Question: Eight guns on your plane?

Answer: Eight guns, yeah.

Question: Wow. So four a wing. Is that -- is that -- they're wing mounted, right? Yeah.

Answer: Yeah, four each. Yeah, all four on a wing.

Question: And you've sighted those basically the same way, off your cowling or --

Answer: Oh, no, no, no, that's set with a gun site.

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Question: Set with a gun site, okay.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: And you plane now becomes, basically, one big gun.

Answer: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's just like firing a rifle. Rather than aiming a rifle, why we're just aiming the plane.

Question: So --

Answer: Here's the gun site -- set the gun site, well hell, you just look through the gun sight. When the gun sight finds a position down there, fire. We usually start in about 400 yards out and fire down to maybe 200 yards.

Question: And how high? How high are you flying? Because that's changing, I mean --

Answer: Yeah, well, that's changing. We probably start in about 5000 feet and then dive down till you're probably down about oh, 2000 feet, I suppose. Or not, yeah, about 2000 feet, that would be 700 yards.

Question: And is that when you start firing -- at 2000?

Answer: Yeah. Well, wait, that don't sound right. Let's see, we -- I used to like to fire my guns at 900 feet, 300 yards. That -- that's where the guns were set for, to be all hit on the target. So we'd start in, I at least, then --

Question: So when you look through your mind's eye and you're visualizing coming down, when you get down low, how -- I mean, how much detail do you see?

Answer: Oh, hell, you can see somebody standing up.

Question: So, I mean you see enough detail that --

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, you can see the gun position, especially if they're firing, why hell, there's nothing to it. Or, you can see people standing out there. Three or four -- well, just like standing, sitting, or standing here. We could see somebody oh.. across the freeway over here.

Question: So that's about how close you are?

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: Wow.

Answer: We usually try to start in about 400 yards out, firing. Four hundred yards, 1200 feet, I -- and then fire down to maybe 250 yards, something like that. And if we knock out the position and know that nobody's going to fire back at you, then you fly back up. But you come down there at an angle about 30 to 45 degrees.

Question: And are you seeing the -- cause you're firing -- what -- the guns that you have, what size shell? What --

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Answer: Oh, 50 caliber.

Question: Fifty caliber, yeah, so it's --

Answer: Oh, it's a nasty damn gun.

Question: Especially if you've got eight of them going --

Answer: Yeah, and then you've got one tracer for each five shells, one tracer, two armor piercing, and two incendiaries that I remember.

Question: So it's a whole mixture of caliber --

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. And that way your armor piercing, hell, it will go through 3/4 inch steel, unless it's special steel --

Question: Now I know in the movies they always show if you're on the ground, you see the dirt --- is that accurate?

Answer: Oh, yeah, that's what you see. Well, just like bullets from a gun, if you fire into the dirt, why you can see the dirt kick up. And this is a lot more powerful than that.

Question: I was going to say, is it just annihilating -- as it -- it just clears a path?

Answer: Yeah, each gun. And your eight guns, of course, there -- and then if you're closer than 300 yards. I think I tried to have mine fire all within three-foot target, but then with the vibration, why they probably go out, I see, figure five or six feet in all directions from --

Question: Cause you've got your plane doing this --

Answer: No, the plane -- the plane's not doing that.

Question: So it's a pretty --

Answer: Oh, yeah, it's stable, stable as hell. Well, it's seven and a half tons. Holy Christ. Just because there's a few guns firing, you can -- you can feel the plane shake a little, pulse a little bit sure. But it's yeah.

Question: And you're in a dive so you've got a G-force going on

Answer: Yeah, yeah, oh yeah.

Question: Now do you -- as a soldier, does there become an issue in your mind of the people

Answer: Well --

Question: See, I don't understand that.

Answer: Well, the only thing is, hell, if they wave at me and shake hands -- well, I'll tell you about that later. But anyway, what the hell, you're -- that's a job you gotta do. It's a

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nasty job. Hell, I didn't like killing anybody. Nobody else did either, I don't believe. But what the hell, if they're shooting at you, they're trying to kill you, why, you don't have much choice. You gotta knock them out before they knock you out. And that gun position, you know, I could -- I -- sure, I could have said, well, geez, they're shooting at me. I'll get the hell out of here, you know, and go back around. Well, then you gotta go back around, keep knocking, working on that guy until -- till you do knock them out.

Question: And you're seeing --

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: -- the reverse.

Answer: Oh, yeah, you're seeing the bullets come right up at you.

Question: Now do -- you won't try to dodge them at all, or do you?

Answer: Oh, you can't. There's no way in hell you could dodge them.

Question: So, do you -- I mean, do you fly then a straight path in?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: I mean, so you're --

Answer: Oh, yeah. No, no, no, you're not dodging around, because when you do, then you can't pick them up on your gun. Or your gun sight, I should say.

Question: Now your plane would take quite a bit of abuse, right?

Answer: Oh yeah.

Question: I mean, those were monsters in --

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Question: Did -- so when you came back, were there -- was it riddled or --

Answer: Not normally. Now that time when -- I don't think a single one of our planes picked up a bullet hole, not that I know of anyway. But some of the other flights, oh, hell, lot of the other guys the same way as myself. I had one flight over Tinian, just when things were probably about three-quarters of the way finished, things were pretty well under control, why they wanted us to go strafe some Japanese on the edge of a bluff where there's some trees. And I couldn't see any fire coming out of the trees or anything like that -- must have been just troops -- probably without the machine guns. Either that or they weren't firing the machine guns. And you can't see the rifle fire. But you could hear the -- kind of uh -- just like throwing a rock on a tin roof, you can hear click and then the click and -- but you can hear the little click, even -- even above the roar of your engine.

Question: Wow.

Answer: But I picked up bullet holes in both wings and, oh, that far in back of me, (gestures) it went up to the radio equipment, on this one flight. Both wings, fuselage, and

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also had bullet holes in the tail. But that was all from rifle fire, and I never saw a single person firing at me from the ground.

Question: So what were the chances of them shooting a plane down with a rifle? Pretty slim?

Answer: Pretty slim.

Question: You'd have to wound the pilot or something, basically or --

Answer: Yeah. But on that flight, why, when they knocked out the radio, why then I went on back home. I didn't know how bad the plane was hit. But I could see the - the metal -- the raw metal, you know, where a bullet goes through it on the outside, where you -- see the puffs -- I could see where the metal had been hit there. I wasn't worried about the holes in the wings. But I knew the radio was knocked out cause I couldn't talk to the tower, so I think I said Mayday, Mayday, and came on in and made a landing then.

Question: Now did you have a co-pilot?

Answer: Oh, no, no, no, no.

Question: It's you, right? And --

Answer: Yeah. You've got no protection underneath from rifle fire or anything else. Now the engine's in front of you, so if anybody's shooting at you from in front. And this happens in one, and then we also have a little plate, like so, that was bullet proof glass, I think it was probably about three-quarter inch glass. So you're pretty well protected from anybody firing right straight at you in front. But underneath, no, you don't have any protection at all.

Question: So did you feel pretty invincible? When you were flying?

Answer: Well, most of the time, yeah. You don't -- well, the only thing is, coming right - - firing at a gun position, why, there's not much danger there. And of course you got to -- they'll be firing at you, and their bullets will be going up, until they -- getting toward the tail end of the trajectory, and then they'll (gestures). But you can see them come on up like that and all you do is just go right straight down the stream. You can see the bullets coming at you until -- till you get them in range, and then you -- then that's the end of the fight.

Question: Huh. Now you didn't -- you weren't facing plane to plane combat at all? You were facing --

Answer: No, I -- all the time I was in the air I never saw a Japanese fighter plane. Now at night, on the few moonlight nights out of the month, they'd send bombers down to bomb Saipan. And we'd see them then and now they could come in off the island. We had night fighters by that time or shortly thereafter, and night fighters were to go off the island now, anytime the Japanese planes were over the island, why they had orders to stay the hell away because we had big -- big guns there to fire on the Japanese guns - ah, on the planes. Japanese planes.

Question: No reason to send a plane up to do it --

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Answer: No, no, hell, no. Yeah. But if ones would come off the island, why they'd be tracking them with the radar, and they'd put the old night fighters on the tail of these Japanese fighters that -- lots of times, why you'd see a big flash in the sky and that's all there was to it. They'd caught up with them.

Question: Wow. What was the -- the island was crucial -- what, it was a stop?

Answer: Yeah, it was just a stop on the way. But it made things so much better, because so much closer to the Japanese mainland. And once they got Saipan, then you knock the Japanese off of Tinian. On Saipan I think they figured they'd had a total of about 31,000 Japanese troops and Navy and all the personnel and everything like that. Military. And when it was all over there was less than a thousand Japanese survivors. On Tinian there was roughly probably 8,000 Japanese troops on Tinian is all and I -- very damn few survivors there. And we bypassed the island of Rot

Answer: And then on Guam, I don't know how many troops the Japanese lost there. But after it was all over, why then they put in just a single airstrip on Saipan would be suitable. The only place that they could have a decent airstrip on Saipan was just the one. But on Tinian, why it was relatively level, after you once got up away from the beach. And they put a hell of a bunch of air strips in there. Must have been, oh, God, I don't know. Probably eight or ten strips. Where they could -- oh, hell, they'd -- and then also on Guam. And once they started bringing the B-29s in, why that was beginning of the end.

Question: So were your planes -- when you put your strip in, did you disburse your planes so they weren't centralized?

Answer: Yeah, oh, yeah. Well, scattered them around so one plane couldn't strafe all those -- that many planes. And we caught a bunch of Japanese planes on Tinian -- not Tinian but Rota, one time. And so hell, all we did is we all took our turns and went down, oh, hell, you could see the planes. And open fire on them, and hell, you could see them fall down, knock the landing gear off them, and hell, you could see pieces flying off of them. So you knew damn well they'd never fly them again.

Question: So you just went and -- cleaned up the airport, basically.

Answer: Yeah. One of the guys -- Leon Cox, number two man on my flight, why, he, busier than hell working on those planes. That was a different flight. But anyway, strafing into the sun. We learned it's better if you don't strafe into the sun. Look up and -- he was looking at a tree and I guess he started pulling up and boom, he hit the damn tree. And he said the top of the tree just exploded. That he couldn't change his prop pitch and flew on back to Saipan. But smashed the nose cone on the -- on the propeller, but it's electrically controlled and he couldn't change it, but it didn't make any difference. But he says, boy, awful shock to turn around and look and see a tree and boom, just like that, he saw it.. darn!.

Question: That must have been kind of a thrill to be able to go in there and to --

Answer: Yes. Oh, yeah, yeah.

Question: -- and see all those planes and just -- you know you're just taking them out left and right.

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah. I don't know what ever happened to the planes there on Rot

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Answer: What the hell they ever did with them. But none of those will ever be -- well, they must have -- I'm sure they've been junked out 50 years ago by now. But they had lots of scrap down there.

Question: So was there -- before we took the island, was there anything on it? Where you were? I mean --

Answer: Tinian, no, they had a lot of I think sugar cane fields, I think. Saipan, why there was a lot of sugar cane. Had a great big sugar mill there. Made -- they could make alcohol out of the sugar, too. That was destroyed.

Question: Were they dug in like at Iwo and stuff like that? I mean at Iwo they had like tunnels and --

Answer: Oh yeah, oh, yeah, yeah, lots of gun -- not so much tunnels, no, very few tunnels but lots of gun positions. They'd had time to build a -- the beach positions especially. Hell the concrete would be oh, hell, good foot, foot and a half thick, and a slit like that, you know, where they could look out and observe where-- and if you know where to look, why even when we went back there, why we found a couple of those. Right by Magigienne Bay. That's where the Japanese figured that our troops would go into the island because there was no steep hillsides or anything like that. And no -- no reef out there, either.

Question: So they definitely were ready --

Answer: Oh, they were ready for the -- if -- if we'd have went in on those beach positions on Magigienne Bay, why our troops could have been -- well, we they -- we lost some men anyway, but nothing at all like that.

Question: Hmm.

Answer: There was still a couple tanks, even yet, all rusted, of course, still out there in the water, out in the west side of the island where they'd just left them.

Question: How big is the island -- ballpark, from end to end.

Answer: Oh, roughly -- about three miles wide and probably five miles long.

Question: That's a little island.

Answer: Yeah, not very big.

Question: I mean you think of you guys sitting on one end and the Japanese sitting on the other end, you guys are --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: You know, you sneeze and they probably say gesundheit.

Answer: Damn, seem to me like it was bigger than that. We ought to take a look at one of those maps, but I -- I think it's about three by five, as I remember.

Question: Huh. But I mean it's not big -- it's not --

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Answer: Oh, it's not a huge island, no. Not by any means.

Question: Huh.

Question: So you had -- the Army Air Corps was there, the Marines were there, and Navy?

Answer: Navy, oh yeah.

Question: Navy was stationed there also.

Answer: Oh, yeah. Yeah, because they had to have Navy there for, oh, rations and supplies for the island. And bringing supplies in. Then there's the Army 27th Division was there. Two Marine divisions, the 2nd and the 4th, I think.

Question: So once you finally got the airstrip secured for however many times it went back and forth --

Answer: Yeah, three times.

Question: Three times. You took out some of their big guns and all that. Did that settle the island down or was there always a little something going on?

Answer: Oh, there was a few Japanese left on the island but not very many. Now they had one last big push. That was on the northwest corner of the island and then they worked back towards Garapan. I think there's about 5000 troops went -- went on that. They were going to -- that was their final suicide.. coming down there. And then they -- now I wasn't in on that flight. But the guy by the name of Henry Moore, he was on that. I think there was -- I don't know whether there was four of them or eight of them. But they just told them to strafe a bunch of trees. Just off of a road., just on the west side of the road, as I remember there. And so they did. Hell, they said they never saw any Japanese at all. I think when it was all over, I think they counted, hell, I don't know, two, two, 3000 dead Japanese there, I guess.

Question: They were just hiding down under the trees?

Answer: Hiding under the trees, and didn't have any cover to -- all the guys, I guess, fired up their, probably 3000 rounds of ammunition each and I don't know whether there was four planes -- I think only four that I know of.

Question: And at this point, if they were Japanese and they were on the island, they were military.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: I mean, there wasn't a --

Answer: Well, no, there's -- there were civilians there.

Question: Oh, there were.

Answer: There were a few families, and then also a few Chamorros. Many of the Chamorros, the natives, they had nothing to do with the Japanese except the Japanese used

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them for, well, more or less, you wouldn't call them slave labor, but they didn't pay them very much.

Question: So did you end up with prisoners in your camps or --

Answer: There was a few Japanese. Now what they did with them in the camps, I don't know. I never saw any prisoner camps but I know that there was. We had some camps there for the Chamorros, the natives. For awhile, just more than anything else, to protect them. And then they'd -- now, the natives, they would -- they probably paid them for working, doing work for us. Didn't pay them very much but they paid them a wage. And then at night, why they'd always take them back to their camp, furnish them food.

Question: That's always again kind of interesting aspect of war --

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: -- coming in, hiring all the people and --

Answer: Now where there's any prisoner of war camps, I don't know. I'm sure that they -- well, now we went back to Saipan in '94, there was -- we were standing there watching a parade. Standing on one of the corners there, just the tail end of the parade. And I saw two or three -- two busses, I think. I remember, stop and open the doors and here come a bunch of Japanese. Hey, you guys, you ready to run? And holy criminy, there was a bunch of them. There must have been, hell, I don't know, probably 50, 75 out of each bus anyway. And some of them were missing legs and some of them you could see where they had an artificial leg. But I thought -- hell, they seemed to be nice, walking down the sidewalk towards. (gesture) I guess they bowed first, then they reach out there hand and shake hands. No hard feelings after 50 years.

Question: Hmm. Boy that must have been interesting to -- to -- to experience that. I mean,

Answer: Well, hell, they all took their turn, so we shook hands with all of them. And they watched the parade there with us, too. I thought, Holy Christ, you know, I don't know if I'd be -- I'd be that nice to a bunch of guys that killed all my -- most of my buddies. Course we didn't fly any -- very many combat missions on Saipan. There was a few. Most of them were over Tinian. And some down to Rota, some as far south as Guam. We flew a couple missions down there. Pagan Island.

But I screwed up my back on one flight on Tinian. I crushed a disk. There was four of us. I guess probably about the 3rd or 4th day of the invasion. And so they sent us down there, just shortly after daylight. What they wanted us to do, in case any of the Marines ran into a problem, why then they'd call us in and see if we could knock a -- you know, help them out. And we flew back and forth several times and they've asked us to go down and knock out an airstrip that they were building. There was a big roller there they wanted us to -- bunch of dirt piled up there and they were rolling it out there with this big roller. And so the flight leader dove down and next guy and third guy and myself and like I said we're about three or four hundred yards apart. And pulled in and fired on the thing and hell, I could see pieces flying off and I thought, well they're never going to use that damn thing again. Started pulling up, but I could see a Japanese gun position firing at the guy up ahead of me, trying to catch up with him, because little Kindle, he was up -- he was bailing out of there, and I could see trying it catch up with him. So I dove down on them because I knew damn well they'd knock him out otherwise. Had to go too steep, so I had to go -- dive too steep, and got him in the gun position, or fired on the thing, real quick, and I could see peppering all around the damn

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thing. Hell, probably a space about as big around as this room. And started pulling up, and horse back on the stick hard as I could cause I knew damn well it was going to be close. I thought I could do it. I said to myself, I can do that, you know. And I horse back the third time, and then I could see the nose come up a little bit more. There's no use putting steady pressure on all your -- otherwise you're just going to stay here. So then I reefed back again the third time, and had a little corner of the windshield, I looked out, and I could see a Japanese soldier bent over and run like a son of a bitch. I guess he figured I going to land on top of him or something cause I was going down pretty fast. But I was probably going 350, 400. And the fourth pull and the fifth pull and each time I could see the nose go up a little bit more. Little bit more. And about that time, why I could feel the plane hit and all at once I started flying off after the rest of the guys. Looked out at the wings and all the gun barrels had pieces of wood sticking out of them. But flew on back to Saipan, that was about ten miles. And like I said, the plane weighted 7-1/2 tons, and if I pulled seven gees or eight gees, whatever it was, seven gees, 7-1/2 tons, that's over a 150 ton pull. And that's when I -- I think that's when I screwed up my back. But anyway, go on back to Saipan, landed and shut her off and wrote it up and went out and looked and the belly tank was ripped off. It was gone. And it.. there was wood fused on the bottom part of the engine, oh hell, so far up. And that was the last combat flight of Josephine. They -- apparently - well, I didn't see it at the time. All I can remember is seeing the belly tank gone. But I really must have -- I don't know what the hell they did to it. I suppose must have loosened up so many rivets they didn't dare let anybody else fly it.

Question: So you bounced her right off the trees then.

Answer: Well, yeah, right on down this way, you know and down to the trees. Luckily I had the nose up. But I was -- I think I got a little assistance on that. (lalughs)It was close.

Question: Boy, that would make you have to change your shorts after that one.

Answer: Well, the only thing is, you never think about that, because you're so damn busy, I didn't have time to worry about hitting the trees or anything else. All I knew was trying to do everything I could to get it the hell out of there. Then, I don't know, a few days later, why then I was climbing up on the scramble buggy for another flight, and I don't know what the hell happened, but all at once I think I had one foot up on the lower step and all at once, why I was paralyzed from the waist down. I couldn't move my legs. So they grounded me and I didn't fly anymore for awhile and sent me to the hospital for physiotherapy. And then they took a bunch of X-rays and stuff and they let me fly one day a week. Well, hell, you can't keep somebody in a forward combat area if, you now, indefinitely, if they can only fly one flight a week. No long flights. I could fly as far as Pagan which was 200 miles north. So I flew, oh couple flights up there. But then eventually, why got ready to go up to Iwo Jima off Okinaw

Answer: And I didn't know where they were going, but anyway they grounded me and sent me back, well, up to the hospital first, on Saipan, for a back operation. They said well, we don't keep anybody over, up to 30 days. And if you're not going to be completely healed by then, why then you would go back to the Hawaiian Islands. And they keep people from 30 to 90 days recuperation. More X-rays, and they decided they didn't want to operate on my back there so they sent me back to McCaw General Hospital at Walla Wall

Answer: And the old doc says, well, he says, you've got some leave time coming haven't you. And I say, yeah, I don't know, a month or two months, whatever, six weeks, whatever. And when I got back over, and he said yeah, you know, are you going to stay in the Air Force? And I said well, I didn't plan on it. Well, he says, let's let this back operation go then for now.

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He says, they're not always a success. Said we can always operate on the back later. Said the Germans have already given up. He said let's just wait and see. So that's what happened. They didn't operate on me for 50 years, that was two years ago they finally -- they had to remove scar tissue on the nerve on the left side of my back. And then they cut away some of the vertebra to take the pressure off the nerve there because my left leg was going numb.

Question: Oh, yeah, wow.

Question: Was, when they say, cause the first hospital you went to was, where, Saipan?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So what were medical facilities like out in the --

Answer: Well, they was mostly for bullet wound, stuff like that. Oh, they had -- they had other stuff there, too, but nothing, you know, nothing for -- if they couldn't take care of you in 30 days, why they send you back to the Hawaiian Islands.

Question: So they were basically a --

Answer: Just emergency stuff.

Question: Fixing up --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Patchwork --

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: Emergency stuff.

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: Wow. Were there a lot of wounded soldiers when you went to the hospital? I mean, was it pretty --

Answer: Ah, there was probably oh, three or four wards of guys I suppose with bullet wounds. And that probably each ward, probably 50 men, I suppose. As I remember. Now may have been bigger than that. God, that's 50-some years ago. I -- I didn't stay around there very much to be honest with you. I went in there for physiotherapy, they did do that.

Question: Sounds like you enjoyed flying. You enjoyed --

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Question: -- your time, and really glad that you didn't become an Infantry man.

Answer: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, Jesus Christ, it's -- I --- I don't begrudge the Infantrymen. Some of those guys liked it. But hell, I flew for 50 years, after I got back to the States, why eventually I got one plane and I flew for fire patrol for the state for a long time, summertimes. I was teaching school, and in summertimes, why hell, that gave me something

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to do. And Christ, nothing I liked better than flying anyway. And then, oh, got a second plane and flew that. Well, I finally sold that in maybe, what, one or two or three, somewhere along in there -- three, in '93, I think.

Question: Wow.

Answer: But I flew for 50 years, I figure well, shucks. Never made a landing I couldn't walk away from.

Question: Close.

Answer: Close, yeah. (laughs)

Question: Was it -- was it -- you know the books and movies and all that, they make war into --

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: Are they pretty far off on a lot of their concepts --

Answer: No, the only thing is, I think if a person gets too damn serious about it and worries about it, I don't think he'd be a good flyer. I think you'd probably go stir crazy, probably, just worrying. So, oh no, I found for myself. I can't speak for the other guys. I think it's pretty much true, though. If you're busy flying oh, one or two or three combat flights a day, why it's just kind of like a game. You're -- you don't worry about it, you're going to do this and you're going to do that. But when you stop and get maybe a couple weeks off, rest leave, where you go back to the Hawaiian Islands, then the first -- first flight -- I don't know, to me at least, it -- it kind of bothered me. You know, God damn it, they're going to be shooting at me, you know? But after you get back in the swing of things and now you're so damn busy flying you don't worry -- don't have time to worry about it. You're always worrying about well, maybe, making sure your airplane's working right -- you just do it.

Question: So it's that in between time that --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: Yeah. Like anything -- I mean it's more the thinking about -- like parachuting. It's more the thinking about parachuting than the actual parachuting that's scary.

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: Huh. When you would go back to -- so you'd go -- if you went to R & R, you'd go back to, where, Hawaii? Is that where -- or

Answer: Yeah, at that time, yeah.

Question: Yeah. So they'd send you back there for a what, a week or something?

Answer: Well, probably a week to ten days. Probably, yeah, about a week. So it would be probably, oh, it could be two day, one or two day flight. Probably about oh, week or ten days. And then maybe week, day or two back down to Saipan, you'd then have three or four days off, maybe a week off.

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Question: So when you were out on an island, you were busy all the time?

Answer: Yeah, oh yeah. And if we had a little break, on Saipan, why, no matter where we were at on the island, if any Japanese planes ever showed up over the field or over the island anyplace that you knew it, why we had the ability to command any vehicle that -- any tank, any car, any truck, anything else that we -- to get back to the airfield just immediately. Most of they times why we -- well, sometimes we were confined to the airport. I got into the dog house one time and I got caught speeding in the jeep doing 30 miles an hour in a -- and I suppose 25 zone or something like that. And so I was confined to the field for two weeks. (laughs) They were really going to discipline me, I guess.

Question: What, now you lived in barracks? Is that --

Answer: Now when we first got to Saipan, why we had a Japanese barracks. Big building, probably, God. Well, probably close to 70 feet wide, maybe 150 feet long. And there were great big concrete posts under the thing, great big ones. Hell, they so thick and -- L-shaped in the corners, the building. When we first got there why, my flight leader, why he called our flight together. We had the four pilots, well, five, four of us and then we had a spare. And he said, guys, he says, let's get some sand bags and we'll put some dirt in the damn things and let's block off this one corner, he says. There shouldn't be any Japanese come over here, but he said that isn't always the way things work out. And so we worked like hell and some of them guys come by, oh, there isn't going to be any Japanese around here. And some other guys went in with us, too. And I suppose it probably took us couple hours, I suppose, to fill those bags with dirt and we used a corner of the building because like I said that concrete was about from here to here (gestures) I suppose, and from that corner blocked off like that. And so we blocked that off and then a little bit more. And I mean sure, we could have had a direct hit from above with a bomb, I suppose, but the chances were one in a million, I suppose. So we blocked it off and didn't think anything about it. And just a few days later, why we had a bright moonlight night. And the Japanese bombers came over and hell, there was -- I think there was probably six of us. Next thing I know -- maybe another guy or two, maybe eight of us. And instead of that, there was 20-some guys in there. (laughs) And the next day some of the other guys started building their own bomb shelter. (laughs)

Question: Weren't laughing anymore.

Answer: No, they weren't laughing anymore.

Question: Do you remember what you guys talked about? I mean, just, I mean, was there time to chat?

Answer: Oh, yeah, we all kind of BS. I have -- this buddy of mine, Leslie Owen, he got killed in the Hawaiian Islands. He and I was going to start some kind of a business after the war but we never got around to it. We didn't know what the hell we were going to do, maybe like a Yard Bird's or something like that, I suppose. I mean we never talked -- we were just going to have -- well, he was a good guy, hell of a nice guy.

Question: So that was the type of chit chat you guys would have --

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: You'd say, when we get home, we --

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Answer: Everybody had their own life to live. And -- and everybody scattered their own -- outside, now, the element leader of mine, now, little Kindle. He and Mel Penny -- Petty -- were always real, real good buddies. Petty lived back in oh, Maryland, back there someplace and little Kindle, why he lived in Oklahoma and then he moved -- later on moved to Texas. But Kindle was a farmer, and Petty, I think he went back to his -- drawing cartoons and Petty girls and that sort of thing. They always corresponded a lot, just like back door neighbors. Now how often they got together, I don't know, maybe once a year, till they both died.

Question: Hmm.

Answer: Both -- both been heavy smokers, I think that's probably what killed them. I don't know.

Question: Now the buddy that you talked about, starting a business back home, now what happened to him?

Answer: Yeah. Well, he was flying the paymaster from the field that we were at, Wheeler Field, which is just south of Kahoolawe Bay there in the Hawaiian Islands. I -- I don't know what the heck happened there. He was flying what they call an 824 or a Navy SBD, same thing. And it's made for short people or tall people, two posts come down through your, what they call your rudder pedals. You push on your left rudder pedal and plane will turn that way or right rudder pedal and plane will turn this way. And it has what they call a kick break. Well there's a little adjustment there you can use with your foot and push it on the pin and adjust it back -- kind of on a rig like this here so you can have it closer or longer for longer legged guy. And I think when he adjusted that on the right side he didn't get it locked tight. Anyway when they were taking off, why plane started climbing up and all at once, why it started gradual turn to the left, come back around and came back down and around and when they hit in the bank of a creek. Killed the paymaster and also he -- but I think that pin came loose in the right rudder pedal.

Question: Hmm. So just -- it was just a

Answer: Just an accident. Q -- one of those casualties of war that had nothing to do with the war, per se.

Answer: No. no.

Question: Do you -- did -- it sounds like you guys didn't lose many guys over there? From your --

Answer: On Saipan we lost, I think, five, six. Let's see there was Kobler and Witzig, that was the first two. We lost both those guys, I think the 24th.

Question: Shot down?

Answer: Yeah, on their flight, why there was just the four of them on the flight. They were over Tinian. They were going to strafe an airstrip there. That's where the Japanese had their main airstrip, on Tinian. And there was a Japanese 40 millimeter cannon, I don't think -- up until then I don't think anybody even realized that they were there. But they hit commanding officer's plane, buckled a wing, but he kept flying. And then they hit Kobler's plane, and his plane blew up in the air and Kobler was too close. And he hit the plane wreckage and he went in. So they lost two out of the four. And the third plane, why, it was damaged. Well, the CO came back and showed us on the map exactly where this gun position

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was at, and he said if anybody -- when we go over there, if anybody doesn't strafe this position, why they're going to answer to me personally. So we worked it over good and they never ever fired the guns again. I don't know whether we killed the guys or ruined their guns or what. I think it was just simply a strafing job, though. I could -- I could find out. Well --

Question: I'll look when we go back.

Answer: Yeah.

Question: So is that another time that the -- you talk about when you went on a break coming back, is that a time when you go oh, my God, we're in, you know, this is real war --

Answer: Well we were still -- still relatively new, cause that was probably the 24th of June, and we flew into Saipan on the 22nd.

Question: Oh, wow.

Answer: So we were still pretty new. Hell, we didn't know really what the hell was going on. We weren't used to combat by then. But then of course, well, hell, we knew where the gun position was at. And I think everybody strafed the hell out of the thing.

Question: So it made you more gung-ho then?

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: Yeah.

Answer: You knew damn well if you don't do the things right the first time, why, in a way, well, you can't blame the CO because he didn't know it was there, I'm sure. By the time he realized they were there, why.

Question: Cause we talked to a ball turret gunner over in Newport and, you know, he said it was sad, but you know, if you saw your friends go down, you'd think better thee than me.

Answer: Yeah, yeah.

Question: I mean there's that part, too, that's in there.

Answer: Once in a while, why from Tinian, why, Saipan was only, or from Saipan, I should say, looking south, when some of the guys would be up on a mission, why you could see black smoke and fire rolled up and you knew damn well somebody went in. I don't remember on which -- Witzeg or Kobler -- I don't think we saw that, but I think we saw one of those observation planes got hit with ground fire. And so we knew damn well somebody had went down. It was kind of a hell of a feeling but not a damn thing you can do about it.

Question: That would be the hardest part, knowing that --

Answer: Yeah.

Question: -- you either were or you weren't going to get it.

Answer: Yeah, yeah. But there was Witzeg and Kobler, Don Dogherty, he went in on a P-38 on a test flight. Plane went off the end of the runway and into a bomb dump where we

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had a bunch of bombs hidden in the sugar cane field. There was Dogherty, that was three, guy by the name of Porter. Now, Porter was following me in -- when we were using fire bombs for the first time. That was close to White Beach on the northwest tip of Tinian. That's where the invasion beach was going to be at. But we didn't know that. They just told us to go over there and -- and dump the fire bombs on a bunch of trees. And, hell, what they do is they hit and they spread out like this here. And you know what the damn napalm is --

Question: Yeah.

Answer: -- it's jelly gas. Anything that will burn in that -- each bomb, probably, oh cleared a path, probably fan shaped, probably 300 feet long and it starts in probably 10 feet wide, and everything burns in that. And then you, second time around, drop your second one. Any gun positions are -- well, hidden in amongst the trees. Now, I didn't see it but somebody was saying that when they went over there afterwards, why there was one gun position hid in the trees like that and the Japanese were standing there looking up through that damn little port, and that's exactly where the hell they found him. Hell, they -- damn flame came in so damn quick and the guys inside, why, it's a hell of a way to die, but we didn't know what the hell we were -- you know, all we did was just following orders, dropping those bombs. Well, we cleared off those hillsides then, all the trees, that made it a hell of a lot easier for our troops going in on -- now they'd sit, I think on that map of Tinian where they -- the Navy had bombarded that whole White Beach area

Answer: I didn't even know they were firing on the damn thing. Now maybe, they said they'd cancelled -- stop the firing until -- let us drop our napalm bombs. I didn't know the Navy was firing on the damn thing. Course they must have, you know, quit maybe before we ever took off or something. But Porter, following me, I was number four and he was leader of the second flight. I -- I think he took off too soon after me. Or at least that's always been my opinion. Now we -- nothing that carrying two 500-pound bombs, which is a thousand pounds. Each -- we carried two fire -- or these napalm bombs, or whatever you want to call it. And each of those would be a hundred gallon tank, so that's -- gallon of -- hundred gallon -- that would be 650 pounds apiece, so it would be roughly 1300 pounds of weight. And the end of the airstrip, they were working already for the B-29's. And I think they shortened our strip and I think his plane hit my prop wash which was just like of going this way, just kind of staggering around, and it hit a blade of a bulldozer that was right off the end of the runway. It hit the blade of the bulldozer and snapped the tail just plain off. When I finished my turn and went up and looked, why I could see flames, Christ, going up 500 feet or so and black smoke. But the other guys took off after him then and so we all dropped our fire bombs and came back home. Now, let's see, that would be six -- I think it was six guys we lost there, on Saipan.

Question: Let me switch tapes.

Answer: Oh, wait a minute, there was more than that. There was two more guys, too.