

Normand Orford

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Question: What I'll do is start by just having you giving me your name, first and last and correct spelling so I can have it on tape and then I also use it to set my audio levels.

Answer: Okay. Yeah.

Question: Okay

Answer: My name is Norman Orford, O-R-F-O-R-D. Norman Orford.

Question: Great.

Question: Now you were in the Navy?

Answer: Yeah, I enlisted in June 23rd, 1941. Because I knew there was going to be a war on and like all young guys, I mean, we were ready to go. I was ready to go. And we didn't know when. Of course we learned on December the 7th, when. And I was in San Diego then. I had almost finished my schooling. And I went to school as an aviation ordnanceman, and of course when I went in, you have to take the GCT, the General Classification Test. Well, I passed among the six highest percent that had ever taken that test in the history of the Navy. So I felt pretty good about that. I mean, and so they asked us what our -- what we'd like -- what branch we'd like -- or what we'd like to be mechanics or what, and so they had three choices. So I wrote aviation ordinance, aviation ordinance, aviation ordinance. And so the first school of aviation ordinance that they had was in San Diego and for that school they picked 25 of the highest out of the 10,000 in San Diego and 25 of the highest out of Great Lakes and sent the 50 of us to school. And I come out 13th highest in the school, so that's not too bad. So they shipped me right to a squadron because during peace time, they don't need somebody who knows something about bomb racks and synchronization and trajectory and ballistics and all that kind of stuff, but at war time we're the most valuable people they've got. Because the guys that are flying are just flying a gun platform, flying gun platform, and so they need people that knew what they were doing. And so, as a matter of fact, I was leading ordnanceman and seaman second at the same time. (laughs) So but that's just the way it happened that we were just two weeks from graduation when December the 7th hit and of course that night we -- we worked all night and we stood watches and it was -- the first thing there was -- turn out all the lights and so we went in the mess hall. I mean if a guy didn't like his food, he dumped it on the floor because it was pitch dark anyhow. Next guy slid in it and it was kind of a mess down there. But they go -- was a mess. But I was going with a gal that I'm married to now at that time. And so I was there for about a week or so, little more than that and then they -- they assigned all of us to squadrons like that and they offered me, they asked me if I'd like to be a teacher and I said no. I want the combat. I want to go out in it. Because, well, I had 80 men in my company and, or 70, and 70 in the other one, 140 altogether, and a lot of the guys were shipped from the company over to Pearl Harbor and they were aboard the Arizona, and so I knew some of them that were killed. And every one of us in the squadron I went into had friends, buddies, shipmates that were killed over there. So we were there, not for the flag raising or for Mother's home cooked pie and that kind of stuff. We were there for revenge because our friends had been killed for no reason at all. We didn't understand why they wanted to declare war. Course we learned that, but the idea, they had killed a lot of our friends. So we went over to kill them back and it worked. And it was very interesting. We mustered on Christmas day. They called us together on Christmas day, read us the rocks and shoals, the rules, you know, of the Navy, they all have to read that. And then they sent us home for the day. So I got to go home for Christmas dinner, cause we lived at -- my folks lived there in Oakland at the time. And then we come back and of course I was shipped out.

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And being shipped out was very interesting because I -- we were all sent to supply and furnished all foul weather gear. Because nobody could know where we were going. That was the whole thing. Everything had to be secret. And so they gave us all foul weather gear -- big heavy helmets, gloves, goggles, boots, and then when we left San Francisco we sailed about 30 miles and turned south. Now we're going down to the Tropics. So we ended up in the Tropics wearing shorts and giving all of our stuff away. The natives all ran around wearing that stuff. Well, we didn't know why we were sent south, and nobody knows why they're sent anyplace. And it is a piece of history that has not been advertised -- people don't know it and they should. And that was that the Japanese -- and they found this out through records written over there and like that plus the fact that some people over here knew it and that's why we went to Tonga. The Japanese had planned two attacks instead of one. Now the one on Pearl Harbor -- the first one, was over from the north, north. That's 23-1/2 degrees north latitude. And that, if it had worked the way they -- that it should have, would have broken our supply lines to Guam, Midway, all the islands, and the Japanese would have controlled the entire north. But they also planned an attack on the south because they had to break our supply line to Australia and New Zealand. And they were -- if they could have established one, New Zealand and Australia would have been taken about two weeks and then we'd have lost them. But as it was, they -- they figured out where the more or less line would be and it went right through Tonga. Now Tonga is 23-1/2 degrees south latitude and almost the same longitude as Pearl Harbor. And so luckily they took us -- we were the first squadron -- the first Navy squadron to leave the States and we were on a Liberty Ship with our planes stacked on the deck. And they sent us down to Tonga because Tonga was the only place that had a dock where we -- it was a big enough town, and if you look at a map right today, there are no other towns down there. That was -- that would have been the only place they could have made headquarters. Where they had a little town, they had enough stuff, stores and like that, that is a grocery store and a bar and a grill, whatever, just the native stuff. There was nothing there for the white people because there were no white people there. And so Nuku' alofa was the town we landed at. We had a dock there so we could unload. And the natives helped us to unload and they were fantastic. They liked us. They didn't like the Japanese. They had -- had already met some of them. And so they were not fond of the Japanese at all. But they liked us. They treated us very good. The first night that we got in there, of course when we unloaded a lot of our stuff, it was right on the docks where anybody could see it. And so two of us were assigned to go over there and sleep on the -- on the dock, in our stuff. So we took the hammocks and we tied them onto trees and we tied the front -- the other end of the hammock onto a -- the truck bumper. And backed the truck up until they were tight, and we got in them and we slept that way. And it was great. And then the next morning, we went out, we found where we were going to be about oh, three, four miles out of town. They had a place more or less, that someone knew something about it. And so we had this location. We went out there and it was kind of fun because they sent us out with rifles to protect our gear. They brought all of our stuff out. They had the natives bringing it all out. And so I had -- I was out there. I was alone. The other guy was doing -- oh, he was in town. I was out there. And so I had the rifle on my shoulder, you know and was walking back and forth more or less just being a guard like I was supposed to be. And the natives over there -- they loved to sing and they loved to dance. And their singing is -- was just out of this world. There's no such thing as any singing like that. The music goes back a thousand years and when they sing and when they dance, you can feel it. I mean it's fantastic. And so we were -- I was walking back and forth and the guys all started -- there was about 25 of them, I guess, and they started singing this beautiful music, and then they started dancing. Well, it was kind of fun because they can tap their foot and more or less call, you know, another one in. And so that's how they got everybody going. Well, somebody come over and tapped their foot for me to come in. I knew no more about it than flying. But I had my rifle and I was enjoying it so I took and I leaned the rifle against a tree and went out and went dancing with

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the guy, trying to learn how. And I looked back and one of the natives had my rifle over his shoulder and he was walking back and forth. (laughs) And they were just wonderful people.

Question: Now did they have -- did they have a concept of what was going on nationally with the war and all that or --

Answer: I think they did. I think they knew more about it than we did by far. Well, Queen Solote (?) who was the queen over there -- the Tonganese queen. She -- she must know. She was the only full queen besides Elizabeth. It is the only one. And of course I used to go swimming with Tupou (?) who is the king now. I knew him. Heck, he and I were friends, you know. And so I have been in the royal hut and like that, which was nothing but a grass hut. But Queen Solote I met and I knew her. She was a wonderful person, and her son, who is now the King, I knew him. And we used to go swimming together and like that. But it was a wonderful place. And we were there -- we put our planes together, and I had to go through all the synchronizing systems. And as I say I was seaman second and they had a second class ordnanceman there that didn't know which way a gun pointed. And so he -- he never even touched the aircraft, I had it all to do. I did them all.

Question: Now this is -- is pretty primitive where you are, correct?

Answer: Primitive? There was nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Question: So how do you get -- I mean where are you putting your planes and how are you -- are you having to -- build runways and --

Answer: To hide them. Oh, no, there were no runways. Ours were seaplanes. So we operated close to the water, but no, there was nothing. The airplanes, they were camouflaged and they, you know, put them out to different spots that we could work on them. Well we found all the airplanes but one. One aircraft we couldn't find. And so we thought it rather strange, you can't lose one aboard ship and you can't lose -- you know, can't lose an airplane. But we did. It took us two days and finally someone went in and they had taken the branches off these -- these vines like that, and covered the thing so perfectly and it was right there, that you couldn't see it. They knew camouflage better than we did. But it took us just two days to be in operation. And so then over there we had enough bombs and machine guns and ammunition like that that we could go into operation.

What our job was, we finally found out, was they figured that the Japanese, if they did hit there, someone had to be there to stop them. That is not to stop them but to -- that the United States know that they were there and defend it as best we could. Well, that's why they told us that we probably wouldn't be coming back. Because there was no way, if the Japanese had hit there, they would have wiped us out in nothing flat. But --

Question: Now at what point did they tell you that? Did they bring you together and --

Answer: They never did.

Question: I mean to say -- to say you might not be coming back. Did they bring you together and --

Answer: Oh, yeah. No, they just scuttlebutt, you know, that went through -- they -- somebody said something to somebody to somebody else. No they didn't come out and make the announcement, but everybody knew it. And they knew that we would probably not be coming back. And so as the old saying goes, to the hell with it. If we were going to die, we're going to die. We didn't worry about that. All we wanted to do was get in there and fight.

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Because as I say, we were mad. Now other people after they were drafted and like that, they were trained, they were trained to fight and -- but we were mad in the first place. And we were never trained. How do you train a guy to do something that he's never seen -- nobody knows anything about it. And here we were out there and we were -- we were fighting against people who had been in battle for -- 1932 they hit Manchuko, used to be Manchuria. And so the Japanese hit there. We in the States knew about that. We knew about the Rape of Namking (?) where they the -- our -- our love for the Japanese was not too strong. Because we knew, in the Rape of Namking where they took the Catholic sisters and stripped them and raped them right in the streets and stuff like that. And beheadings and like that. We saw some of that in movies, the Fox movies, on the news, and so we knew that we were fighting a tough enemy. We also thought that all Japanese were about 5'2", wore heavy glasses and had buck teeth. Well, the ones we finally ran into when we got into over in the Canal and like that -- were the Japanese Imperial Marines. You had to be 6' tall to be in it. And they had to be in perfect fighting shape. So we hit -- we hit the very best.

But it was interesting inasmuch as we -- we left Tonga and after we'd been there about, oh, maybe two or three months. We knew the Japanese weren't coming because the Battle of Midway went on, they lost four of their carriers there. And so we were pretty safe. But Nuku' alofa was a beautiful harbor. We looked up one morning, we had about seven of our ships in there, the Chicago and the Boise and the Helena, the Portland -- they'd just come out of the Battle at Midway and they come down there to patch up their bruises and they pulled into Noumea because it was the best harbor. So we were in the east spot where they would have been. And they were flying -- we flew day and night looking for submarines and made sure that everything was okay. We didn't run into much trouble there, very little. So, but as soon as it was quiet and they knew that the Japanese weren't going to come there, they grabbed us and threw us aboard ship and sent us out to find where they were. Well, say, we were a lucky squadron. We were scheduled to die. So anyhow we sailed to Noumea at New Caledonia.

And the interesting part was that you'd see all this convoy stuff. We didn't know what a convoy was. We were alone. We were a Liberty ship and we're out 4000, 5000 miles from home. No convoy, no nothing. We were alone. Until we got to Noumea. We pulled into Noumea, we hid in the harbor there and we were there for one day. Nobody got shore leave because they -- they didn't want us to go out and get drunk or anything like that. But how would you get drunk over there? But -- on native brew. But anyhow, just one day and then we had a convoy. We had two destroyers. And there were three -- three of the C3 class -- they got the two booms forward and the one aft and the five cargo holds and they got -- the Libra was one of them and oh, there were -- anyhow the three of us, we started north. Up to where, we didn't know where we were -- they never told us where the heck we were going. If someone hadn't spoke up we still wouldn't know where we were. But anyhow, we started toward Espiritu Santo. We were going up to the New Hebrides and we so we had a convoy and we took off. Took off the next morning or that night or something. Anyhow, we left and we sailed up through Torpedo Junction. Well, Torpedo Junction was just off the Coral Sea and like that where the Japanese were pretty famous for having subs out there. And about one o'clock in the afternoon we were lounging on the deck cause we had nothing else to do. And the destroyer come cutting across our bow and got about oh, maybe 500 yards away and started laying eggs, dropping depth charges. Well, come to find out, that was a Japanese sub down there that was laying dead in the water. They shut everything off and therefore they are dead in the water and you couldn't hear them. So when they started the engines to turn the sub to slam a fish into us, the destroyer picked up that -- that sound. And they went over and they -- they got it. And that was the first submarine that we had seen and it was kind of pretty because it was one o'clock in the afternoon, or sometime in the afternoon, real nice. And we watched these depth charges go off. And they are exciting when they go off, God. And so all of a sudden we saw the bow of this Jap sub come up. It didn't reach maybe more than 10 feet out of the water, and then slid back down. And so we knew we got it. And so

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there was about 95 guys that we didn't have to worry about fighting any more. So we got through that, Torpedo Junction.

Question: Let me ask one question. So now you, you were out, you had some down time. You were out hanging out on the deck.

Answer: Sure, just laying around.

Question: All of a sudden this D comes screaming across your bow and starts -- what goes through a 21-year-old kid's mind at that time?

Answer: Nothing. What the hell?

Question: You just think we're out for another joyride or --

Answer: No, we knew there was a war on. And when they started coming through like that we knew that there was a sub out there. And so we all got back a ways from the port side where the fish would have come in. And we watched it because it was just like a news reel, you know, you watch it. And we thought what the hell, if we get it, we got it. But we didn't get it. And we had not been close enough to death to know what it felt like or any combat of any kind until we hit that. And so it was kind of fun, you know, to watch it. We really enjoyed it. And of course when they saw the bow come up and sink, why we all cheered. We were very happy. We weren't the friendliest bunch.

Anyhow, we got into Espiritu Santo -- we pulled in there and of course we unloaded our planes and our men and like that. We got off and we were based there. And that is a rot hole of the world. I don't care what anybody says. It was the worst living conditions for the Navy. We were not -- the ship board Navy -- we were the Navy that was on the beach because we had the only planes and like that that were rigged for submarine. We could throttle down to 90 to 95 miles an hour. That's pretty darn slow for an aircraft. But we could do it. And still carry our torpex bombs and like that. So that we could more or less hover over and find, if there was a submarine there, we made sure we didn't miss it. Of course we had to make sure that we had enough altitude. That was one thing that was my job to tell the fellow get up there now. Anybody who, you see a sub in the water, you know, you want to go right down next to it and so you drop the bomb on it. Well, the minute you do that the explosion is going to come up and flip you over and you're dead. They had to stay up. I told them you've got to stay up 500 feet, and the pilots, they said, well, we'll do what -- and I said I don't care what you do. But I told the radio men that were flying with them, I said now, if he starts down, bail out. Because he's not gonna come back up. So I made them stay at the 500 foot level while they were bombing. But we pulled into Espiritu and that, as I say, was the rot hole, I cannot believe the conditions we lived under.

Question: Give me a brief description so I know what the plant life and, I mean, what am I looking at at this place?

Answer: Well, what you're looking at is flies, mosquitoes, poisonous snakes, spiders, rotten food, no place to sleep. We slept on the ground and there were snakes on the ground, naturally. We would take a plate of food, and this is honest to God, we would take a plate of food and it would be black with flies. You'd take a spoonful, you go (gestures blowing and gulping) and you'd still get about a half a dozen flies. So after the third or the fourth, you just went ahead and ate the flies and all. But it was just that rotten. I mean, and the food was not good. It was served in a pan. Well, you have to realize that our supply line from here to there was about 6,000 miles. So we didn't really have too much. And it -- the flies just crawled all over you. One fly landed on my arm and I took my hand and I brushed him off

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and he went up and down. I brushed him again and he went up and down. Fourteen times I did that. And that fly just went up and down. (gesture) Well, you know, it was pitiful.

Question: Are you just the beach crew? Did you just bring in tents and set up temporary housing or what -- where were you sleeping?

Answer: We slept on out -- no, we didn't have any temporary housing. Lord, no, we didn't put up our tents until after we were up on the Canal. No, they had a couple of them there and -- a tent was no good because it -- it didn't keep the mosquitoes out. And at night you could hear them rrrrr, boy, they sounded like they were little bombers coming through. And mosquito netting is no good. You can have it for the first few days and then you forget it and get up and walk through it to get out or something. So it -- but the conditions there were unsanitary, unsanitary, they were filthy. And the flies, the mosquitoes, and the poisonous bugs that we never even heard of. And they also had these big pythons, beautiful big python, 18, 20 feet long, you know. Kind of gave you the willies. Well before the war they used to go over and they'd buy them from the natives, you know. I had a chance to go out with the natives. One day they said they were going to go out and get this python. Of course they natives spoke very poor English and I spoke very poor native but we managed to get along. And so I went with them and of course I carried a Thompson submachine gun because I don't like snakes that well. And they found this, oh, it's about 17 foot python, a big one, up in the tree, hanging on the branch and let it -- so they took sticks and they banged there until the darn thing dropped out on the ground, and then it started crawling and it crawled into a hole. Well it got in all but about five feet and so the last five feet the natives jumped on it, grabbed it, they started dragging it out. As they'd pull out another foot, another native would grab it. And so here was the natives in a long line this (gestures) going and finally the head come out. Well when the head come out about three or four guys jumped on that thing. One guy got bit, but -- then we brought it in -- brought the darn thing in and the line going through the jungle was just like that. (gestures) But they caught it. But we had a lot of poisonous snakes over there. Well, like Australia right now, of 165 snakes they got, 145 are poisonous. But we had a ball up there. And there was nothing to keep them from being in our tent or in our bunks or like that, our sleeping, sleeping, just we slept on, it was rotten. And one night we had a submarine come up and lob a few shells in to keep us awake at night. And so they said we've got to get that submarine and so we need two volunteers to stay up and sleep in the aircraft, and if it comes up the pilot would run and jump in and you'll take off and bomb it. But there will be no lights when you come back. There was no lights anyhow, they'd have to build a fire or something like that. But they said there'll be no -- no signals at all. You'll be out there and you're done. And so he says we have to have a volunteer for that. Volunteers, and yours truly was a volunteer. And so I got to sit in the aircraft and sleep there, which is about as uncomfortable as you could get but at least the snakes couldn't get to me. The bugs could, and we slept there for two nights but the sub never surfaced again. If he had of, we would have gone out, bombed it, and been in pitch black and we'd crashed in the ocean someplace.

Question: Now did you stop at this island because it was a key island or this was just a convenient --

Answer: It was a key island because it was in the Hebrides and they built a hospital there and like that before they were through with it. They had a hospital there, and a good land runway. Good enough that you could take off and land on it. Of course it was not blown to pieces like the next one was. But anyhow we stayed there just long enough to put our planes together. We had to take the floats off them and put wheels on because we changed to a shore base inasmuch as they wanted us to be able to land on Henderson Field if we made it that far. We didn't know where we were going but they loaded us aboard ship again and this time we were on a cargo ship -- a good one, a C3, which tickled me to death. Instead of a

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Liberty Ship. And we sailed up and went into Guadalcanal. Well we got there about oh 5:30 6 o'clock in the morning and we didn't know where we were at until finally they told us, this is Guadalcanal. This is where you are. This is where we're going to be. And so we still didn't know where the heck we are, but we saw the map. Someone got maps out and showed us where we were. And so when we pulled in, we -- the first thing we did was to look up and here come 26 horizontal bombers -- Mitsubishis. And I looked up and I said by God, they're trying to kill me and I just got here. Well, they come over and they dropped a 25 plane -- 26, dropped a load right off the bow. Luckily they were a little over and so we didn't get hit. But then our fighters were fueled and we had Henderson Field, went up, nailed them. But Guadalcanal, when we pulled in -- it looked like an island of death. It smelled. It wasn't beautiful like, oh the Tropical -- some of the South Sea islands were beautiful, that coconut, palms and green and like that. Not the Canal. The Canal was dead, really, and the ridges -- the mountain looked like the back of one of these prehistoric animals, you know, all the sharp points. And so it was really not inviting. But we knew what we were there for. Well anyhow the bombers come in, and then they had no sooner left than we had 25 planes, fighters, come in strafing us. They all had a little bomb present for us. And so I was standing on the deck watching one come in and he was letting us have it with the machine guns and I just stepped in back of something, I didn't get hit. But anyway I saw him drop the bomb. They had a 500 pounder, and he just right over the ship and landed in the water on the far side about 10 feet off the ship, and caved in the side of it little bit. But that's the way it was. I mean it was wild. We unloaded as fast as we could and we got -- got into the landing craft to take us in. And the strafers were still there, they wee strafing us while we were climbing down the nets and things like that. I mean we were -- we were right in the -- it was rough. And so we got over onto the beach. They run up and dropped the bow so we could get in. And we grabbed our stuff and started across the beach. Beautiful tropical beach. And we got to enjoy it for almost 30 seconds before the first plane come down strafing and we could see the bullets, see. You see it in the movies once in awhile, you see -- well, it's true. That's the way they look. So I -- I was like the rest of the guys. We scattered real fast. And I saw a hole there to get into, you know. And I started making a run for it and the guy says sorry we're all full. I said haw! Well, I made other remarks too. I went in and a Marine come in after me. And there were plenty of room. We got out. We never could have got back in again. But when they're strafing at you, you'd be surprised what how little you can hide behind if there's a rock out there, you're completely hidden. But that was our welcome to the Canal. I'm just running along here --

Question: No, you're doing -- this is exactly what I'm --.

Question: So when you got to the Canal, were the Marines already there, or --

Answer: Yeah, No, the Marines we were there. We were there. They had taken Henderson Field, more or less. The Marines took it the second day and then the Japanese had to take it back. Well, the fighting went on and the Marines made Henderson Field, you know, for us. But we actually had Japanese planes land on Henderson Field. They thought it was theirs. We were that close. I mean it was pitiful. Well, about the best way to describe the location and the amount, if the back of your hand were all of Guadalcanal, we controlled a spot about the size of your little fingernail. And that's all. The rest of it was Japs. There were 25,000 of them on there. They're still there.

Question: And you knew -- now today when you say Guadalcanal, people know, Guadalcanal. But now you're 21, 22 years old, they said, hey guess what, we're at Guadalcanal.

Answer: Big deal. Where's Guadalcanal?

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Question: Another island -- is that --

Answer: Another island. It was just a place -- well it was a place to fight. God we fought over there. We knew that we were in the fight because the strafing and bombing, we had four or five bombings that day. The first night that we got in, they -- we didn't know where we were going to sleep. Who cared where we slept, you know, we were out there in the jungle, we had nothing. And seriously, we had nothing. People don't realize what nothing means. My brother was here in the States and I wrote him a letter and I said it's getting near Christmas time, would you go and buy something and give it to the folks for Christmas from me. And I got a letter back from him and he said, well, they would appreciate it much more if you just ran down to the corner drug store and bought a little something for them. I wrote back and said the corner drug store is 5000 miles from here. There is nothing. There was no repair shop, there was nothing over there. And I keep using that word and it is the most descriptive that I know of. But the first night we got in, we spent the day and that night they say well you fellows are going to have to sleep over here. They took us down, they had Army trucks. Actually they were the trucks -- they were the ones we were using were the Pontiac that was made in the United States, shipped to China to help the war there, so there were American planes, American trucks, we had Chinese dashboards on them. But then the Japs took them over from the Chinese and they put Japanese license plates on them. So we were driving American trucks with Chinese and Japanese -- going through -- that's the transportation we had, and that's all. But anyhow we loaded aboard this and they took us to a place, there was a little enclosure there, and there was stacks and boxes, and they said sleep on those. And so we did. We just lay on the -- we didn't try to lay out a mattress, you know we had these little coil mattresses. We just slept on the boxes and we thought it was kind of strange, it stunk in there and it smelled and we had the rats running across our faces and like that. You'd feel them, you'd know they were there and like that. But they kept on going from us. So we slept there that night with -- and of course we had about three bombing raids. The next morning we woke up and we found out we were sleeping in the morgue. That the only place they had where we were safe that had a fence around it where they could watch us, you know, and they give us a couple Marines to watch us to keep the Japanese from coming in and killing us all. And all these boxes were full of dead Marines. And so wooden boxes, you know, they didn't take the time to pack them very neatly. They just took the body and threw it in. And of course the blood and like that leaked out and so we were sleeping in some of that. It was -- it was a great night.

The next day we went up and found the place that we were going to be and so we did manage to pitch about four tents. And it was wonderful because the -- the tents was no protection at all. We had camp cots in and so we had and the mosquito netting and of course the first time you got into bed you tucked the mosquito netting all around and then the air raid sirens would sound you right out through the side of it. And so the second time you didn't even use it. So we all got -- everybody had malaria and tropical fever and like that. It was just one of the things you had. And the fox holes -- people think we had to dig fox holes. We didn't. We took Japanese fox holes. They had them all dug; they were nice, they were well dug in. We were between Emerson Field and the water and that was only about maybe a quarter of a mile, half a mile. There was not too much room in there. And it made it great because during that -- we had the big Naval battle that started on the 13th, 14th and 15th of November, with a big one and we had a few before then. But just the night before that, two Japanese destroyers come down and lobbed one thousand five inch shells on Henderson Field and between Henderson Field and the water. So we were there. And they lobbed a thousand shells, and that's an awful lot of shells. Just blew, God they blew holes in the runway, they got a few planes, killed a few guys. They killed so many guys over there that we used to muster the chaplain in every morning to tell somebody else goodbye. We come back with nothing. We lost all of our guys over there. We had 11 men when we come back. And everyone was a stretcher case. There wasn't one guy walked out. It was that bad. I mean they killed us off,

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believe me. They -- they told us we were going to die and we come darn near doing it. We thought we were gone a couple nights. One night they come in and we had two battleships that lobbed 14-inch shells into -- onto Henderson Field. Well, when they'd circle around, if they were short, they were never long because on the other side was the Japanese. The Japanese -- they were close enough that I have sat like this (gestures) and watched the war going on. I could see the front lines. You know, guys shooting at one another. And we sat there and watched the damn thing. So, and we were close at night. And so when the wagons came around, they shelled in there and if they didn't want to raise the gun, they lowered it a little bit and they blew them right into where we were camping. They threw 750 rounds of 14-inch shells. Now a 14-inch shell, you know, it's not 14 inches long, it's 14 inches through this way. (gestures) And it's about 6-1/2 feet high. And of course they were armor piercing and they were also they had the explosives. So when they lobbed it into hitting the ground it would blow up and become a daisy cutter and they used a lot of those, too, daisy cutters. They don't have them now. They got rid of them, but that's where you drop a bomb and instead of just a casing on the bomb, they have all rivets, about, oh maybe five, six, seven rows of rivets. And so when the bomb hits, all the rivet went out, and that's why we called it daisy cutters because it would just cut the grass and if you happened to be there it took care of you, too. Well, we had -- we first got in for 24 hours a day, every four hours and fifteen minutes we had a new bombing raid over, for 21 days. Now that is really rough. Boy, they blew us -- and yet we would go right on and fly in it. The Naval battle, the big Naval battles, we had -- we only had cruisers against their battleships like that -- they had us well outnumbered but we out-shot them and like that so yeah, we're still here. But when they go around Sable Island which was right out there right off of Henderson Field, when they went around the island when they come back in and this was at night. All -- everything was at night over there. All the shellings and like that. If they had no target, the Americans would raise their sights up and arch over Henderson Field and try to hit the Japanese position. If a Japanese come around, they would lower their gun sight and blast them into us. So we hear (whistle, boom) all night long. And this went on for three nights. And it was one of the wildest battles that -- well, they say it was the hardest fought battle of the entire war. Because we didn't know what we were doing. We did not know how to fight them. They knew jungle warfare. Luckily they were not too bright. And we always appreciated that. Because they couldn't think for themselves -- they didn't think for themselves. And well like one night they decided they would have a Banzai attack. And I've had three of those, by the way. Where they -- they said there's going to be a Banzai attack tonight. And that's where they yell Banzai and you could hear -- oh, sounded great. Well that means we're coming through. They're not going to stop. And one night we had barbed wire put up and they come running right into the barbed wire. Well when they hit the barbed wire they stopped. And of course you had the machine guns there, they were killing them, and they were actually climbing over the top of one another to get to us. And I don't know how many dead they stacked up that night but there was a lot of them. One night we had a Banzai attack and when they had a Banzai attack we knew that we were on our way out. That's all there was to it. When you got 2000 guys there coming at you and they're not going to quit and you've got about 100, 150 so and that to protect you. And so they came through that night, the evening just before night. And they said now look fellows, when you go back to your tents tonight, remember, if the Japanese attack, if there's a Banzai attack, do not back up. There's no place to go. In other words you stay there till you die. And so -- and you're told that about three times. You kind of appreciate (laughs) but it was rough. One night we killed 800 of them. Now that's a lot of guys to stack up. We had them thick enough that we took a bulldozer and cut a trough in the beach and shoved them in and covered them up.

Question: Now this is one of the hardest thing to understand having never experienced war because you talked three days of this bombing, Banzai attacks going on. Is it just where you were 24 hours a day in this hyper or --

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Answer: No. What the hell -- all you can say is what the hell, we're going to die. And so you did your best. You fought, you flew, we'd fly all day. We'd fly from 4 o'clock in the morning till 9 o'clock at night. The planes would come in, they'd land, we'd refuel them and out they'd go again. We'd hang new bombs on them, every bomb that was hung by our squad, I hung it, I was in charge of it. And so I lifted a lot of 325 pound bombs, you know, we'd put -- anything to get them up there. But no, the bombing -- the shelling may only last an hour or two, but the bombing raids, they went on all the time, one after the other and there were nothing you could do. You couldn't worry about it. I mean if you worried about it, you'd drive yourself nuts. And no sense of doing that. It -- a man that's -- if he's nerves are gone, he's done. And so there was no help. No way to go. Only we were there and a lot of our guys died.

Question: So is there a point where you, for lack of a better word, where you relax in war?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: I mean, and so it's like, okay, this is my job and --

Answer: That's right.

Question: Just like me going to work, you can --

Answer: Yeah. Well you have to. You had -- there was no reason for anything else. I mean -- we knew that we were going to get killed. We figured we were. And so we acted like we were already dead. And so we didn't have to worry. You know cowards die many times before they're dead. The brave but once. And so we figured what the hell, we're either going to get it or we're not. And lot of night and in the fox holes and like that we'd say, well, we're going to get it. This could be it. So this is it, so what. You said your prayers and that's about it. And you didn't ask for a lot of stuff because there wasn't a lot. And I think William Bendix said it best in a movie called Guadalcanal Diary. They were in a fox hole and they were being shelled and he said a prayer and he said -- any time you're in a spot like this, you try to be forgiven, you ask that you be forgiven and you give up this. He says that's ridiculous. You get out of it you do the same things you were doing before. You're not gonna to change. I mean I don't know how many times I told the man upstairs, if we make it through this one here, we're not going to be flying anymore. We're through. We're going to quit - be on the ground. (laughs) Next day we were up there flying again. No, it was very exciting. But after it was all over we were scared. I mean you could feel it afterward. Shell shock for years afterwards. When I come back to the States, I mean, I was in Oakton, California and I could hear a siren clear across town. My wife couldn't hear it, and I could hear it, pick it up, knew where it was at.

Question: Now you had a day that you got a little closer to not being so lucky.

Answer: Oh, yeah.

Question: Now what happened that day?

Answer: Well, that was -- that day I was out on the -- working on the planes. We were -- during the war we could. There was no ANR, there was no assembly, there was no place that we could do anything else except keep, you know, make sure that the airplanes had ammunition and bombs and like that. And so I was out there, we were always checking the planes, keep them going if we could. And it was about - about 2:30 in the afternoon or

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something like that. It was very quiet, there was no one out there. There was a line chief and he's still alive as a matter of fact, I know him real well. He's down in Santa Cruz, California, Del Heskett. So he was the line chief; he was out there and I was out there and a few other guys. And we had a pilot that come out there looking at the planes. Of course we would once in awhile get a new pilot in. We wouldn't get a plane, we'd get a pilot. Cause they just lucky that way, and then the pilot come out and his name was, I guess, Christopher Columbus Freeman. That was his name. He's from St. Louis. As a matter of fact I wrote to his folks and like that. But he come out and he was looking at the planes and he says you know I've never flown one of these things. He says I've flown them off carriers that had, shot off a catapult and like that, God, he says, I've never taken off the ground and I don't know how they operate and like that. And so he was just more or less looking it over. And they guy come running over from the OP tower, he says a sub out here about -- he told about where it was, and so there was no other pilot. He shouldn't have been allowed to fly, but as I say we cut an awful lot of corners. The line chief says can you fly this crate? And the guy says yeah I guess I can. And he turned to me and says you fly with him. I said well, why not. The guy says I've never flown this plane before. I says I've never flown with you before, let's go. And it was just like that, boom, boom, and we were in the plane. We went down and took off, we had the -- revved up the engine like that. And as I say, the aircraft itself was worn out. We flew the airplanes until they fell apart. There was no -- no place to check them out, nothing. We flew -- and the plane I was in, you're were supposed to have a 20 hour check and 30 hour check and all that kind of stuff. We had 680 hours without any kind of a check, we just flew them until they fell apart. And it was kind of rough so -- but we got in it and we started out and we went down the runway and he pulled back on the stick, he pulled back a little harder than he should have, and he brought us up to 300 feet and he tried to level off at 300 feet and the crew chief, the line chief was watching and some of the other guys were watching, the metal smiths and mechanics and like that that were around. But I was the guy that was stuck to fly with him. But anyhow we got up to 300 feet and the plane just wouldn't hold. It just -- we had -- we had two torpex bombs on -- 350 pounds, 325 apiece, and so we just nosed slowly down into the trees and I screamed at him I said drop the depth charges because in that way if he'd dropped the depth charges we'd had enough lift to get into the water but he didn't drop the depth charges and the -- I hollered -- I told him to drop them and called him a few names which you're not supposed to do but I told him he was kind of dumb. You know because I could see it coming. And my last words was here it is. And that's it. I mean this idea of you see the heroes in the war where they -- they get the apple pie and Mother and all these freedoms -- bunch of -- the only thing -- damn it, I've had it. And that's what I said. I've had it, poom. And we hit the trees and we come in at, well I guess about 80, 85 miles an hour, anyhow fast enough that we hit the first tree and it knocked the wheels down. Now this was all described to me because I don't remember any of it. Naturally I didn't have time to think of anything. But knocked the wheels out and we nosed in and we hit the next tree and it turned us sideways and we went through and we hit a coconut tree and it split us in half. He took his half and I took mine and he knocked over nine coconut trees and so did I -- it was the same number, going end over end, one way or the other, you know, and we were ripping the coconut trees out. And he was buried with the engine. He never knew what hit him. There was not enough of him left to take off the engine. They just buried him. And with me, when I ended up by then, I was right in the Marine encampment and it was just -- everything worked out right for me. No one else made it. We don't have another guy that made it through a plane crash. I was the only guy and I was just real lucky. But as I said I knocked over nine coconut trees and then the plane come down, the whole front end of it caught fire and I got burned real bad. I've got big scars where the metal melted from the airplane and was stuck on my leg they had to tear those off and onto my foot and my arm, as you can see the scars here. That was all gasoline -- I caught 140 gallons of gas there and burnt this to where the bone was laying out here when they did the operation they had to scrape the bone off. That's the operation that Eleanor Roosevelt watched, by the way. She got sick watching it. (laughs)

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But she talked about me that night on the radio describing my plane crash and my arm and like that and the fact that I received 27 pints of blood. There was a blood drive -- I got 27 pints of it. So when I -- we hit right in a Marine encampment. There were guys sleeping in their tents. And one guy ran over and grabbed me when it crashed. He saw that I was hanging over the scarf (?) ring which is the ring that the machine gun goes on. He grabbed me and pulled me over the side and then the rest of the plane blew up. And so the whole front end of it was on fire. But he got me out and they pulled me right out, dropped me into a jeep and I was on the operating table in less than two minutes. And that's -- as I say, this I have to tell you is not my recollection. I don't remember any of it. The only thing I remember is that I called to my chief and he was not there, of course. I said make them take the straps off my legs. Cause I could only feel from here down. I felt the straps and so I passed out again and then I -- I was there for about three days or so and as soon as they figured there was a chance of me living, a doctor sat alongside of my bed or 24 hours working on me. They worked and worked. And then they took and they flew all of us who were -- they could, they flew us down to New Hebrides to the hospital down there. And before I left I said Doc, I can't see. He says you're all right. He says your eyes are bandaged. I says Doc, I can't see. He says your eyes are bandaged. And the biggest thrill I think I've ever had, I took my hand like this and I touched the eyeballs. I could feel them open and I knew that I couldn't see. I figured that I had -- luckily he said no, you're all right. He said you've been hit so hard on the side of the head that your eyes are out, but you'll have them back. And so I flew down to New Hebrides into Espiritu Santo again, and down with the flies, the ones that I described before. It was just that stinking -- and the hospital was make-shift. It was out in the open and like that, really. And so when they worked on you the flies were crawling on you. And they used -- they decided to try this new paraffin wax treatment which didn't work by the way but we made real good guinea pigs anyhow. They would take and -- and treat the stuff, then they had a spray gun with paraffin wax in it and they sprayed this all over you. And that was supposed to keep you clean. And then the next morning they took you out and they had to carry me out and set me under a shower and I got to wash all this paraffin off. Well as I washed the paraffin off the flies come on. And so after a few days of that kind of stuff I got gangrene and I had gangrene in the arm and both legs. And the Soltice come in that day to take loads of guys -- now they hauled them out every day that they were there, they'd take them down to New Zealand and like that. They took one look at me, said get this guy aboard right now. And so I had top priority getting there, because I was turning black from gangrene. You know gangrene is not the best thing in the world to have, rather have a cold any day. But they put me aboard and then they took and tied my -- they tied gauze bandage around my fingers and tied this to the upper bunk and they tied my two legs down so I couldn't -- because the head injury, they could not even give me a shot of morphine. They could do nothing. Except they took and for an hour and a half they tore the skin off. And this was -- they had three doctors there. One on one leg and one on the other and one on the arm and they sat there with tweezers tearing this stuff. Well after an hour of that I said please Doc, let me die. And that is on record that -- and as a matter of fact they wrote a newspaper article on me here awhile ago because I says I can't stand this any longer. I can't take this pain. Let me die, please. Let me die here. He says oh, you'll make it, don't worry, you'll do it. I did. For an hour and a half they tore all the skin off the thing and both legs and it was kind of painful. (laughs) But they saved the arm and legs. I would have lost them. I'd have died over there from that. And they -- they got me cleaned up and took me -- I got into Auckland, New Zealand and I was there for about, oh a little over a month and then they shipped us back to the States. And so they...

Question: I have to switch tapes here, just a second.