

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. Dean Caswell**

Date of Interview: December 8, 2021

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## **Fredericksburg, Texas**

### **Interview with Mr. Dean Caswell**

Interview in progress.

Mike Zambrano: This is Mike Zambrano. Today [December 8, 2021] I'm at the home of Colonel Dean Caswell. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information. Good morning, sir! How are you?

Mr. Caswell: I'm just fine. I'm ... I'm getting a little older (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckle), could you tell us how old you are?

Mr. Caswell: I am ninety-nine years old as of last July, so the coming July, I will be a hundred ... hundred years old.

Mike Zambrano: That is amazing!

Mr. Caswell: I was born in 1922.

Mike Zambrano: And ... and I understand, just so we get it out of the way early, you are the last living World War II Marine ace, is that correct.

Mr. Caswell: That is correct. The only one left.

Mike Zambrano: The only one left. Well, first off, thank you for your service, and you partially answered my first question. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Mr. Caswell: Sure, I was born in the mountains of Los Angeles in California on Jan ... uh, July the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1922. Is ... the reason I was up there, my father was an entomologist down in the desert, it was hot, and Mother had to had a cool place to have her baby.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Caswell: We were not there too long, I was ... the whole family was transferred to Edinburg, Texas where he became the lead entomologist for the Department of Agriculture.

Mike Zambrano: Oh ...

Mr. Caswell: So, he had a good education, and he insisted that I have one also. So, I graduated from the Edinburg Junior College aft ... after two years. And that's how I got into flying because with a ... a call ... call to the U.S. Army in my pocket had immediately volunteered with the ... to the Marine Corps because they were accepting applications for people who had a college degree, junior college or above.

Mike Zambrano: Before I forget, uh ...

Mr. Caswell: This is my wife.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckle).

Mr. Caswell: That you've met.

Mike Zambrano: Yes (chuckles).

Mr. Caswell: Okay, okay.

Mike Zambrano: It was Banning, California you were born?

Mrs. Caswell: (Whispering), coffee, coffee is in there, black.

Mike Zambrano: Yes, that's fine, thank you. Now, was it Banning, California that you were ... that you were born?

Mr. Caswell: In ... in the mountains of ... just ... in ... in the lower heights, if you will, of the San Jacinto Mountain.

Mike Zambrano: How old were you when you moved to Texas?

Mr. Caswell: I was twelve.

Mike Zambrano: Pretty different terrain, I would think, right? Is it ... is it flat out in Edinburg?

Mr. Caswell: Uh, we had a car and a ... a mountainous stuff on our trailer and it was a long haul from California to ... to Edinburg, and the roads ... roads were not very good.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, I imagine.

Mr. Caswell: We were on Highway 66, sometimes and sometimes we couldn't find it (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Mr. Caswell: It was ... it was Depression years, Jim, it ... things were tough all over, even though he as head entomologist, Dad was making a hundred dollars a month.

Mike Zambrano: Really? Is ... and that was ...

Mr. Caswell: So, so it was (laughter), as soon as I could walk, I think I always had a job to do to make money.

Mike Zambrano: What was your father's name?

Mr. Caswell: Ira (sp?).

Mike Zambrano: And your mother's?

Mr. Caswell: Vivian (sp?).

Mike Zambrano: And ...

Mr. Caswell: And he was born in Georgia, and she was ... she was Cherokee.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: She was born in Oklahoma; I'm Cherokee.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, okay.

Mr. Caswell: I'm root of her (?).

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Mr. Caswell: And ... and we hid that knowledge in those days.

Mike Zambrano: Why?!

Mr. Caswell: Dad thought we could probably get along better with everybody.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: And if Caswell was Irish, so then didn't make any difference that way.

Mike Zambrano: I'm just curious, but a hundred dollars a month, uh ...

Mr. Caswell: It's a lot of money now.

Mike Zambrano: But was ... was it a lot of money then?

Mr. Caswell: It was ... you could raise a family on it.

Mike Zambrano: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Caswell: I had three sisters, and no brothers. I always had a job when I got to Edinburg either sweeping somebody's floor, mowing a lawn, or working for a creamery. I even worked nights from eleven o'clock at night to seven in the morning for three years to get through college.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Caswell: That's tough.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, that is tough.

Mr. Caswell: Because we needed money, and you had to have money to go to school.

Mike Zambrano: Now, you had a ... a two-year degree 'cause it was a junior college?

Mr. Caswell: Junior college.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, so it was a two-year degree?

Mr. Caswell: I ... I finally got degrees elsewhere, many years later.

Mike Zambrano: What was ... well, uh, I'm assuming you went to the University of Texas eventually?

Mr. Caswell: No.

Mike Zambrano: No?

Mr. Caswell: Did not.

Mike Zambrano: Oh okay.

Mr. Caswell: Massachusetts Institute of Technology ...

Mike Zambrano: Oh!

Mr. Caswell: ... of ... I got halfway through that and I wound up in degrees in the Naval War College. I got a Masters in the Tactics and I got ... I got a lot of skilling in the Marine Corps. Took advantage of it. Dad preached it and I found the value very useful.

Mike Zambrano: Well, what was your degree in?

Mr. Caswell: In Tactics, Naval Tactics. I spent a lot of time aboard ship, so I was very familiar with that, and I got into the board ship business when the Marine Corps put me into a fighter squadron after training. (Other voices in background). Flying the Corsair, and that Corsair squadron was put aboard the USS Bunker Hill in Los Angeles in November of 1944. With two Marine squadrons aboard that ship, it became the flagship for uh, Admiral Mitscher and his crew. That's important because Mitscher was a graduate of Pensacola, graduate number seven after World War I; (chuckles), he was an old man.

Mike Zambrano: The Bunker Hill, that was his ... his flagship, wasn't it?

Mr. Caswell: That's what?

Mike Zambrano: Was the Bunker Hill Mitscher's flagship?

Mr. Caswell: He was ... it was the flagship for he and his staff, and quite a few months later in battle, we were hit by two kamikazes and we lost eight hundred men.

Mike Zambrano: I was reading about that.

Mr. Caswell: I was aboard ship when it was hit.

Mike Zambrano: I did want to back up a little bit 'cause I did read something that maybe you can verify this. Uhm, I read somewhere that you ... you and your cousin hitchhiked ... hitchhiked to Los Angeles to enlist?

Mr. Caswell: Yes, we would ... there was a period in which it was time to leave home. Dad had left home at eighteen and without even saying so, he expected me to do the same, so I hitchhiked by gas truck from Edinburg to Dallas, from Dallas to El Paso, El Paso to Los Angeles, the kindest drivers I could have ever met. In this day and time, you wouldn't do that.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, you're right.

Mr. Caswell: They even bought me sandwiches 'cause I didn't have any money (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: Well, that was nice! But you're right, that wouldn't happen today (chuckles).

Mr. Caswell: The ... the money I made working in Edinburg I gave to my mother.

Mike Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Caswell: To help her ... to help with the family. But I had a cousin that I was raised with, and he lived in Los Angeles. He met me when I ... was deposited at the ... the train station there. And we both ... both had the call to arms, so we ... we just marched down and joined ... joined up. He wanted to join the Marine Corps with me and fly, but he didn't have junior college or ... or college, so, he joined the Navy.

Mike Zambrano: I ... I read something about the bottle of bourbon helped you both chose the Marines.

Mr. Caswell: (Laughter).

Mike Zambrano: What was that about?

Mr. Caswell: Well, there was a little celebration in meeting him. I was raised with him, and then we were separated for about fourteen years, and so, it ... it was a gleeful meeting. He ... he was a double-first cousin. His mother and my dad were brothers and sisters. His father and my mother were brothers and sisters. They had a double wedding, and he was born three months after I was born.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, well, you're pretty close in age.

Mr. Caswell: So, we were little kids together. After the World War II was over, we got back together many times, but he died very young, a mistake made by a surgeon ...

Mike Zambrano: Oh.

Mr. Caswell: ... on the table, but that's not my story.

Mike Zambrano: That's too bad. Uhm, you and ... you ... you both enlisted, was it two weeks before Pearl Harbor, is that correct?

Mr. Caswell: I joined the Marine Corps two weeks before Pearl Harbor, that's right. So, I was on a waiting list for flight training. In those days, you had to go to a civilian pilot training outfit to determine if indeed you could fly an airplane before the Navy would spend any money on you.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckle).

Mr. Caswell: So, I had to wait on that list, waiting list, and I worked for Lockheed making the P-38 fighter for about a year.

Mike Zambrano: For ... so, you worked for about a year.

Mr. Caswell: Had ... I had about a week without food some place in there, and I had a room that I had rented and couldn't pay for, but I borrowed a loaf of bread from the lady who owned the (chuckles) owned the room. That's what I ate on. So, I was glad to have a job, and it was a good job.

Mike Zambrano: So, what exactly did you do?

Mr. Caswell: I outbreded (?) a five-hundred-ton punch press. A very large machine, took two hands on two buttons to make it work so it wouldn't smash you to death. And it took twenty-four ST aluminum and formed it into the shapes they needed to make the body of the P-38.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Caswell: I kind of grew up then. And before then, I wasn't too sure I was a ... a man yet. But by the time I got through flight training, I knew I was a man. It was a *good* program!

Mike Zambrano: So, you ...

Mr. Caswell: A lot of athletics, a lot of officer training, a lot of different stage of flying, doing it slowly and doing it well. I had probably two hundred hours of flight time when I graduated. A lot of young fellows later on didn't get that time.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: That served me *well!*

Mike Zambrano: So ...

Mr. Caswell: Because these young guys were killing themselves right and left because they didn't have good training trying too hard to make too many ...

Mike Zambrano: So, you are at Lockheed for a year which puts you about December of 1942? What happens then?

Mr. Caswell: Well, a date that's in my mind ... I've got aboard the Bunker Hill in November of 1941. All of these (unintelligible) things happened before that. And the Bunker Hill, the story of that is how I would begin my story of my work in the Pacific. I had a hundred and ten combat flights in the Corsair from the Bunker Hill.

Mike Zambrano: Well, let me ask you ...

Mr. Caswell: Shot down ... shot down fifteen aircraft.

Mike Zambrano: Fifteen?

Mr. Caswell: That was approved, and shot down many more that were low on the ground, and you were not allowed to uh, claim those if they were under five thousand feet in altitude. So, when we raided airfields, we just killing airplanes all over the place. In my log book I have twenty-eight kills (laughter). But I couldn't count then, and I didn't want to count them. I wanted to get the hell out of there. It was a tough war.

Mike Zambrano: Right. Well, now that you bring that up, you're ... you're going in low, you're ... you're shooting at these aircraft; it sounds like you were ... you were scared?

Mr. Caswell: Uh, I get asked that question many times, "Were you scared when you were flying in combat?" I would say every time. You flew with that readiness of the body and the mind so that you were *not* killed. An interesting view of the airplane and ... in combat is that down at Edinburg, I could shoot the twelve



gauge shotgun, twenty shells would kill twenty birds in flight, so I got pretty good at that, so I used the nose of the Corsair like I did the twelve ... twelve gauge shotgun.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: And in one battle, I shot down seven at one time. I got the Silver Star for that.

Mike Zambrano: Well, let me back a little bit so I can ... when you ... the training you went through because I know there are different phases like basic and ... and pre-flight. Where did you take some of your flight training?

Mr. Caswell: The first ... the first chance at the airplane was Prescott, Arizona, a little flight school there that had Luscombe ... Luscombe 8-As they called them (unintelligible), light aircraft. I soloed that airplane in three hours, the flight, flying came easy to me. Fact, I enjoyed the hell out of it. And from there, we went to what we called officers training which is like a boot camp. We were physically hardened. Having lessons on that to be an officer a rather foolish mistake, but nonetheless, they had it. And that was four months of that. Then we went to the biplane. You see the Yellow Peril (showing picture).

Mike Zambrano: Oh, the ... (unintelligible).

Mr. Caswell: Biplane. I have ... I was given over a hundred hours of flying in that which was every kind of flying you can think of – slow flight, short, short runway flights, dead stick landings, all kinds of acrobatics. I was very fortunate because a lot of young pilots didn't get that.

Mike Zambrano: You mean later on or before?

Mr. Caswell: Anywhere. They would jump right to an AT-6 or something like that.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum, okay.

Mr. Caswell: And we'd ... we lost a of them because of ...

Mike Zambrano: Because of ...

Mr. Caswell: ... I could quote some figures, but I'm not going to do that today.

Mike Zambrano: So, you ... you feel that ... that there is some lack of training and cost some pilots their lives?

Mr. Caswell: Many, many. I ... I know a number, but there's no point in telling you.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Caswell: I couldn't ... couldn't verify it. And it was from Reader's Digest.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Mr. Caswell: They were pushing the pilot too hard to get him graduated so they could send him somewhere and fill a requirement for a squadron. The Army was very bad about that. I lost some real good friends in school that way.

Mike Zambrano: Hum. When you refer to the biplane, you're talking about the Stearman, right?

Mr. Caswell: Stearman.

Mike Zambrano: The one ...

Mr. Caswell: And we called it the Yellow Peril.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, that's ... I ... I've actually had the opportunity to ride in one.

Mr. Caswell: It's made by Boeing.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, it's a beautiful plane.

Mr. Caswell: There were several makes, different horse powers, and they ... they had a required ... different propellers. The ... the best one had a ... a two hundred and fifty horse with a steel, I mean, aluminum propeller, and you could do anything in it. I could spend the day telling you all the things you could do in that airplane. And we did them all! And I had a Marine captain as my instructor and that cheered me up some going through Navy Flight Training as a Marine (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles). Uhm, when you first ... I ... I believe it's ... it's Los Angeles where you board the ... the Bunker Hill?

Mr. Caswell: No.

Mike Zambrano: Ah, okay.

Mr. Caswell: San Francisco.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, in San Francisco?!

Mr. Caswell: Yes.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. What did you think of the Bunker Hill when you first saw it?

Mr. Caswell: Uh, to tell the ... the truth of the matter was that I had the flu. And I walked aboard under my own power, but was sick as a dog. So, I immediately went to bed under the care of the ship's doctor. I slowly got used to something I'd

never seen before, I'd never been in anything bigger than on road, but ... but this was an amazing ship. It had a lot of things on it, a lot of space for carrying weapons and fuel. It was eight hundred and ten feet long. The flight deck was eighty feet from the water.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Caswell: So, before we, as part of flight training, we learned to jump from a ... a diving board eighty feet above the swimming pool. I think there was about only one or two ways they could do that without ripping yourself apart.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: All because that carrier was eighty feet (laughter) ...

Mike Zambrano: It ... it was that just ...

Mr. Caswell: ... above the water.

Mike Zambrano: Was that just in case you had to abandon ship?

Mr. Caswell: Just in case. We did get an abandon ship, but most of the people had already jumped anyway.

Mike Zambrano: So, what was the special way that you had to jump in?

Mr. Caswell: Say again.

Mike Zambrano: What was the special way that you had to jump in?

Mr. Caswell: Oh yes! Uh, you wanted every opening in your body closed, so you used both hands.

Mike Zambrano: Or do you like cover your mouth and nose? Or ...

Mr. Caswell: Here (indicating with his hands).

Mike Zambrano: Oh! Okay (chuckle).

Mr. Caswell: Here, here, here and here, back end.

Mike Zambrano: So, do you like dive in feet first or just drop in?

Mr. Caswell: We did ... we jumped in, we didn't dive, jumped in with our bodies straight up and down just like a pencil.

Mike Zambrano: So, you would, uhm, maybe some like this, covering your ears or ... or like ... or like this, your mouth, covering your mouth and your ...

Mr. Caswell: Well, naturally your hands can't cover everything.

Mike Zambrano: Right (laughter). Well, you pointed all of those areas, I thought well ...

Mr. Caswell: You just ... you just ...

Mike Zambrano: ... you (unintelligible).

Mr. Caswell: ... you grab and jump! And you have a life vest on and that screws things up when you hit the water.

Mike Zambrano: Oh.

Mr. Caswell: But pilots have been known to dump ... jump three thousand feet and live through it; it probably broke a lot of things. But ...

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: ... not very often, but it happened.

Mike Zambrano: Well ...

Mr. Caswell: It happened at Santa Barbara where I was trained in the F4U.

Mike Zambrano: It happened to somebody that you knew?

Mr. Caswell: It was part of the ... one of the squadrons, and we lost a number of pilots just in ... in the training. We had leaders assigned to the squadron who had just come from the Pacific, from the islands, and they had been through it, their hell, and they were ... they had lived. A lot of them did not, of course, but they were assigned to our squadron as division leaders, and they taught us everything they knew about fighting the Japanese fighter. So, we were far ahead of some groups that didn't have that. We had a marvelous airplane, I could talk all day about the Corsair.

Mike Zambrano: That's a beautiful plane.

Mr. Caswell: I flew it.

Mike Zambrano: Is ... now, is that what you were ...

Mr. Caswell: Fact, I flew it in three wars. I had two thousand hours in it (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: Wow! Uhm, were you assigned to the Corsair ... to fly Corsair when you got to the Bunker Hill?

Mr. Caswell: Well, lit ... a little more complicated than that. When I graduated after asking ... an F-4 form I filled out to be a fighter pilot, I got my Navy wings as a bomber, dive bomber pilot.

Mike Zambrano: Oh really?!

Mr. Caswell: I was very disappointed. So, I had a ... one of ... one of graduate friends ... we found the headquarters on ... at Pensacola, Florida ... that's where we graduated anyway; we found the person who made the decisions what we were going to fly as the result of graduation. When we finally found the office that did that, it was one of the prettiest little girls you ever saw in your life making the decision just by filling out requirements for this and requirements for that and putting a name there and putting a name there, and she had made me a bomber pilot. So, I took ... well in hand, the ... the problem, invited her to dinner that night, and we had a few drinks, and I made a few promises that I never kept.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Caswell: And the next day I was a fighter pilot.

Mike Zambrano: Oh ...

Mr. Caswell: That's how I got to go to the Corsair (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles). Oh boy, okay, that's a good story.

Mr. Caswell: And as you know, we used it in other wars.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: So, okay, you ... you've boarded the Bunker Hill, and it was the ... it was in November, and you ... the ship sets off. Do you recall where you went first?

Mr. Caswell: I certainly do. There was an atoll in the South Pacific not too far from Sydney, Australia. Uh, that atoll was made up of a number of small islands one of which held a three-thousand-foot runway, but lots of water in between. And in that atoll, we amassed Task Force 58 which was a fleet of ships carrying assault troops, assault weapons, ammunition. I don't know how many boats carried ammunition, fourteen carriers ...

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Caswell: ... nine big carriers like ... like the Bunker Hill and five smaller ones, I think. And it ... it was quite a sight to see all those ships there at one time. Admiral Mitscher, a graduate of Pensacola himself, I think I mentioned.

Mike Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Caswell: He was graduate number seven. He was the task force commander, and he was an expert on the use of the big carrier and the tactics of that fleet in carrying out the various missions that we used in ... in fighting the Japanese on ... on their, well, fortress islands. He did a good job. So, we ... the Bunker Hill reported there as the flag ship for the Admiral until he got his fleet put together, and then we headed straight for Iwo Jima.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: And we participated in Iwo Jima for five days and had the most rotten weather that we had in the entire Pacific while I was out there. And we lost planes because we were flying with the bottom of the clouds and rain, heavy rain sometimes probably two hundred feet above the water. And our job was to put bombs and rockets into the tunnels of the Japanese that had dug big holes in Iwo Jima Mountain; there was two of them. And then after you made your run on Iwo Jima, you have to turn around and find the carrier that you left (laughter). We didn't have any electronic names like they have now.

Mike Zambrano: So, how did you do it?

Mr. Caswell: You had to find your carrier. Did you ever hear of a square search?

Mike Zambrano: I don't think I've ever heard that term.

Mr. Caswell: Well, just think of the compass. You're looking at a compass with north and south, east and west. You just make ... the first heading from where you are is due north, and you go for a number of miles, let's make it ... let's make it ten miles. You fly ten miles, make a left turn, fly ten miles due ... due west, fly due south ten miles and then you go east ten miles and you have covered that big square of water. Well, when you got through with Iwo Jima for instance, you ... you knew pretty well where the ... the fleet was. It was out there some place.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: Not over there and ... and not on the other side of Iwo Jima, but you had a general idea, so you did square searches until you found your carrier or somebody's carrier. Often you were just running low on fuel, so you would land on somebody else's carrier. It was not a pretty war.

Mike Zambrano: No.

Mr. Caswell: And a lot of them didn't make it 'cause they ran out of gas. They didn't know how to do a square search. We lost lots of people at Iwo Jima, four thousand on the ground and in the air.

Mike Zambrano: I have been reading something about Tomi ... is it Tomitia (sp?) airfield? Does that ring a bell?

Mr. Caswell: Tyler?

Mike Zambrano: Tomitia airfield?

Mr. Caswell: It's not ringing any bell the way I'm hearing you. Spell it.

Mike Zambrano: It's T-o-m-i-t-a-y-a.

Mr. Caswell: Tomitaka.

Mike Zambrano: Tomitaka, okay. I had a lot of trouble finding it, but I ... I have been ... I was reading that ... that it was on that mission, bombing that airfield, that's where you shot down your first three Japanese fighters, is that correct?

Mr. Caswell: Oh no, that's a hard question because (pause) we went right to Iwo Jima and their support ... as soon as the boss says head south, we start on a northern path with ... with our carriers. The armada that made assaults on islands, they stayed behind for a while, but we started razing, uh, raiding well-defended islands that the Japanese had put airfields on.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: Tomitaka is on Kyushu.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: Kyushu is just south of Honshu, that ... that's the main Japanese islands. We were three thousand miles from Tomitaka when we left, uh, I'm putting things together now when we left Iwo Jima. So, on the way, we were headed toward Tokyo; that was a huge raid and another story. But we raided a lot of islands that had airfields and airplanes. I think on the trip down I had shot down three just on that trip alone.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Caswell: Sometimes you attacked an island that didn't have an airfield (chuckle) that (unintelligible) didn't always work out. But ...

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Mr. Caswell: ... a lot of things come back to me when you say Tomitaka as did have several airfields.

Mike Zambrano: Well, that makes sense.

Mr. Caswell: And I probably shot down sev ... several at Tomitaka airfield.

Mike Zambrano: That makes sense. So, wherever there was an opportunity to attack a Japanese airfield, the task force would go for it basically.

Mr. Caswell: We tried to destroy, in ... in fact, we had a mission, to destroy Japanese air power. That was the duty of the ... the carrier warfare. Now yes, we launched airplanes in support of troops when we got to big islands like Iwo and Okinawa and several others. We were out there and fighting the battles for ... for our soldiers. The Japanese knew we were coming, so they had a lot of anti-aircraft equipment in their assaults. But the whole Jap ... the big ... the big Japanese islands were just cluttered with airfields and manufacturing plants. They were really set up for a long-term war.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Caswell: They were. So, our mission after Iwo Jima was to work our way north until we got to Kyushu and Tokyo. We had a mass raid on Tokyo with four hundred Corsairs. See, we had two ... two Corsair squadrons on the Bunker Hill, and the nine other ... of the other nine carriers had other squadrons also. We launched four hundred airplanes against Tokyo, first raid after Doolittle. And we lost probably a third of them including the ... the leader of the attack. And my wife Mary's husband had to take over. He was a Marine pilot in the other Marine squadron on the Bunker Hill, good friend of mine. He died sixteen years ago, mine died ... my wife died seventeen years ago.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, I'm sorry.

Mr. Caswell: So, (pause) we had a chance to get to know each other for fifteen years, and I married her (laughter). But her husband got the Navy ... Navy Cross for leading that attack against Tokyo.

Mike Zambrano: And he was on the Bunker Hill you said?

Mr. Caswell: He was on the Bunker Hill.



Mike Zambrano: Was ... was James Swett a part of your ... part of your ...

Mr. Caswell: He was the executive officer and operations officer of the MF221. His picture is right up there (showing a picture). In fact, that is 221 pilots that ... that you see in there. Walk over there and take a look. (Momentary pause). Jim's on the top row, I think. I'm on the left side, Dave's on the right. Anyway, he's somewhere up there. A very, very fine man. Instead of shooting, he shot a lot of planes down before he came to us, and so instead of siting some Japanese and he was leading a division or so, he would tell somebody to go shoot those airplanes down. He said, "I've got enough." (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter). Oh, so he was willing to share, huh? (laughter). That was nice. Uhm, you had ... you had mentioned ... we've already talked about the first three that you shot down, and as I was reading about the carrier, uh, your group attacked the Yamato, is that correct?

Mr. Caswell: Yamato?

Mike Zambrano: The ... the large Japanese battleship?

Mr. Caswell: The mountain?

Mike Zambrano: Yamato, Yamato, Yamato, yeah no, yeah, the ... the Yamato. It was Japanese, largest battleship.

Mr. Caswell: Oh, the ... the battleship?

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Caswell: No, we ... the Marines didn't ... were not allowed to attack it.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Caswell: Only Navy. They all got Navy Crosses because they sunk it.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, okay.

Mr. Caswell: That was a funny little story about how the Navy worked.

Mike Zambrano: So, why wouldn't they let the Marine pilots in? I mean ...

Mr. Caswell: Well, would you believe that the daily operation report sent out by headquarters of Admiral Mitscher every day would tell how many pil ... uh, how many Japs the ... the Navy had shot down. They were quoting Marine figures not ... not Navy. We only had three Navy planes aboard. Two of them were torpedo planes and the other was a bomber.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Caswell: They never gave the Marines any credit. And you can write that up in your story if you want to.

Mike Zambrano: So ...

Mr. Caswell: I was not given my Silver Star by the Navy. The Marine Corps gave it to me four years later.

Mike Zambrano: So, it ... it was just basic branch rivalry that they gave all those numbers to the Navy?

Mr. Caswell: Yeah, it (pause) Mitscher caught a lot of hell we heard, this is all hearsay, when he chose the Corsair to be his fighter planes for his Task Force 58.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Caswell: He thought the Corsair was the best fighter plane in the world. He was a pilot himself; he knew airplanes. That ... that's all he knew was airplanes and carriers.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Caswell: Other parts of the Navy, this is where you get into the civilian aspect of running the military. Certain parts of the administration wanted Grumman to furnish all the airplanes, another part picked another company, but Corsair got the bid from him. And as it turned out, it was better than anything the Japs had; it was better than the P-51 in Europe because it was designed for something else. We were designed to shoot rockets and drop bombs as well as fight in the air; the P-51 could only fight in ... in the air with machine guns. So, Mitscher had a lot to do with what kind of airplane you had.

Mike Zambrano: Okay, well it explains a lot. I mean, you're about ... you're a lot of the P-51s in Europe and you ... you're a lot of the Corsair in the Pacific.

Mr. Caswell: A good airplane, a very good airplane. It was not built to land on a carrier (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: The Corsair?

Mr. Caswell: The Corsair was. In fact, we had a Marine by the name of John Dobbin who almost uh, well he ... he allowed us to get ... to get the Corsair because when

the Navy was making trials of it, the tail was bouncing over the hook to catch the wire on the carrier.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, okay.

Mr. Caswell: And nobody could do anything about it, but he did. He was an engineer; he was also a pilot and also a good friend of mine. And he designed the shock absorber for the tail wheel so that when it hit, it didn't bounce 'cause when it bounced it picked that hook up and started jumping wires. That ... a lot of little stories like that.

Mike Zambrano: And just to be clear, when you're landing on a carrier, there's several wires for that to catch, right?

Mr. Caswell: Well ...

Mike Zambrano: Four?

Mr. Caswell: Then you had a barrier wire; three wires that high.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Caswell: Like a wire fence.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, okay, alright.

Mr. Caswell: And if you missed all of them and you're still down, you would run into that. But that was kind of a sure death program.

Mike Zambrano: Oh! Really?!

Mr. Caswell: I ... I never had a problem, but then the Corsair works hard to get aboard a carrier because you couldn't see out over that long nose.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Caswell: You had to turn the airplane and be have ... have it out of the corner of your eye, have the carrier in the corner of your eye as you came upon the deck and the L.S.O. [landing signal officer] gave you the signal to chop the throttle.

Mike Zambrano: That's right because it's ... it was ...

Mr. Caswell: And that ...

Mike Zambrano: ... at an angle, or at least the ... the front portion was at an angle, right, of the Corsair?

Mr. Caswell: Well, you had a three-point landing attitude ...

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Caswell: ... just before you hit the carrier. Two knots above stall. If you were faster than that, they'd wave you off. If you were lower than that, you'd fall in the water. It was a very specific thing you had to do.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm!

Mr. Caswell: I had a ... a hundred and fourteen landings (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: So, you had a lot of things ...

Mr. Caswell: Just for the Pacific. I had three hundred more later on after the war.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm, let's see, the gear ... the next time that you shot down a Japanese aircraft was on ... well, I read it was on the ... on April 1945 ... Ka ... Kakiashima (sp?)? I guess around Okinawa, is that correct?

Mr. Caswell: (Pause) I don't remember a Kakiashima. There's something like that that had two airfields. I got three there.

Mike Zambrano: Yes. If it's okay if I ...

Mr. Caswell: Oh Kikai (sp?).

Mike Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Caswell: Kikai.

Mike Zambrano: And ... and then it said that ...

Mr. Caswell: My memory's coming back (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: It is! It said something about being a hundred ... on a combat air patrol, a hundred and fifty miles or so north of Okinawa and that's when you shot down another three?

Mr. Caswell: No, I shot down seven on ... on that ... on that story.

Mike Zambrano: Seven in ... in one ... in one outing?

Mr. Caswell: In one outing.

Mike Zambrano: Wow! Okay.

Mr. Caswell: We ... I will tell you the story. We were given a place to orbit and wait for the Japanese to come down from Japan that was a hundred and fifty miles away from the fleet. And on the surface was two destroyers with radar that would watch in the ... in the direction of Japan, the air space, and be able to tell our waiting fighters that were orbiting, a hundred and fifty miles away from the fleet, that here comes the ... here comes the Japs, and started an air battle

about twenty thousand feet, twenty-five thousand feet high because they had their best fighters up there ready to fight us to protect the kamikazes that were coming down right off the water. That was the set up. I had a division of four to take the high altitude, and there was another division that took the low altitude chasing the kamikaze. Suddenly, we got a heads up from the ... one of the radar people that twenty-five air ... twenty-five aircraft were sighted at twenty thousand feet headed directly toward us. It wasn't more than two minutes we were face to face, and there were three, oh, just three of us; I had to send my number four man back home with a bad engine. We don't know where they came from, how they were trained, but they were flying a very modern Japanese fighters like uh, like the ... they copied the F-109 the Germans had, the ... the 140 that the Germans had, they called them the Frank (sp?).

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Caswell: The one ... the 109s were called Tonies (sp?) and I had a Tony coming directly toward me when I saw him, and he was already firing his twenty-millimeter cannon toward me. And yes, I was scared; I only had three. And I'm ... I'm facing an unknown twenty-five. So, we could do nothing but hold our position, and so we really ... really got together to see our target because it's quite hazy up there. I instinctively, uh, well, I'd already armed my fifty calibers; I had six of them – three on each wing. I automatically, when I saw him firing, I just pulled the trigger, and it hit him head on, and you've got a picture of it up there (showing him a picture).

Mike Zambrano: Ah!

Mr. Caswell: That was done by an artist ...

Mike Zambrano: Hum (looking at picture).

Mr. Caswell: ... for the Museum of Flight in Seattle. Oh, there it is.

Mike Zambrano: So, this was ... this is the first one shot down in that battle?

Mr. Caswell: That was the first airplane that we saw, and I hit him first, and he jumped out. I didn't know that; I thought he exploded. I met him during the Korean War, by the way.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mr. Caswell: (Chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: How did that happen?

Mr. Caswell: That's another story. Anyway, it ... that flight that they had, if they had a formation at all, it split apart, going every which way you can think of, all of them trying to get to these three Corsairs. And I was using my twelve-gauge shotgun theory of shooting which I knew where ... well, I used to practice on steel net targets being drawn by another airplane. My cameras recorded seven shot down. My wingman said there was three more, but by then ... uh, we were ... all three of us remained alive.

Mike Zambrano: You all made it?!

Mr. Caswell: (Unintelligible) got six, and the third man got four, and the others turned ... and the Japs turned around and went home (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: What about the ... the kamikazes that they were escorting? Did they get through or did they ...

Mr. Caswell: I never knew about the battle on the ground, uh, on ... on the ocean floor. They would send sometimes a hundred kamikazes. Matter of fact, I've written a book called Kamikaze Craze. It's almost in every museum, I guess, now in the United States. I was the only ... only pilot that I know of that wrote a personal experience of fighting the kamikaze. You never could get too close because if you hit him, he exploded. They all ... all carried about two thousand pounds of explosives of some kind.

Mike Zambrano: That would have made for a pretty good explosion in the air.

Mr. Caswell: Pardon?

Mike Zambrano: That would have made for a fairly large explosion in the air.

Mr. Caswell: It ... it would get the ... the shooter, too.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: We lost a lot. I think the final total of ... of the Pacific War was we lost four thousand pilots and that's, no, we lost two thousand pilots, they lost four thousand, the Japanese. But who knows? Who's counting (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Well, I guess it's the end result that really counts.

Mr. Caswell: And we didn't argue and fight over how many we were credited with, and we didn't give a shit when you finish a war like that when you fly every day, death every day. We lost half of the squadron, the first flight out. We got ... got replacements, we lost them. Got replacements, we lost them. And then we got hit, and there was just me and my wingman aboard ship; the rest of the squadron was flying.

Mike Zambrano: What was your wingman's name?

Mr. Caswell: Uh, I'll tell you in a minute (pause); that's a long time ago. He was a good one, and he died right after ... he died of heart failure ...

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: ... shortly after World War II. I'll think of it in a minute.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Uhm, (pause) that must be ... it must be very difficult living with all that ...

Mr. Caswell: Say again.

Mike Zambrano: It must be very difficult living with all that death around you.

Mr. Caswell: Well, it's more than that. I was a young man (pause) for the ... for the Pacific War.

Mike Zambrano: Well, you were just what? You were just ...

Mr. Caswell: It ... it took a good five years after the war was over for me to ... to straighten myself out because when you ... whatever you have gone through, and the ... the guys in the trenches had the same problem, something happens to your mind to hit, you know, have death right there every day, every day, every day or every *landing* and ... with the airplane; every day you have a chance to get killed just landing an airplane. You become a different person – callus, crude, don't give a shit, to hell with everybody! And then we went off to another war. I ... I kind of got over mine, and I think I became a human being, but then I had two years in Korea. I was ... I was a basket case.

Mike Zambrano: In Korea?

Mr. Caswell: I've got ... I've got a picture of me after the second year; I don't even know who it was.

Mike Zambrano: That was in Korea?

Mr. Caswell: In Korea.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: I had three hundred and fifty combat (pause) flights in Korea. I've written five books about it. I like to write.

Mike Zambrano: I ... I understand where the Bunker Hill was hit by the two kamikazes that ... you weren't flying; you were ... you were on the ship. But, why weren't you flying?

Mr. Caswell: I (chuckles) the Navy didn't like it that I got seven airplanes credit ... credited which I never mentioned to anybody, so there was such a fuss about it, the commanding officer of our squadron who ... who was really Jim Swett at the time, he made the ... me and my wingman the duty officer for that day. So, it was about ten o'clock in the morning; we had gone to the officers' mess which was four decks down below the hangar deck.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Caswell: Well, protected except from ... from smoke, and we were ... we both were there. Suddenly, we were hit twice – *boom, boom!* Each airplane was carrying a six-hundred-pound bomb, I think it was, I'm not sure. We were knocked flat on the floor; all the lights went out, and we were carrying (throat clearing), excuse me, carrying oxygen masks, had to ... that's kind of silly we thought, who the hell's going to drop chemicals on us? I ... I used ... my wingman and I used the oxygen masks to breathe while we found our way out in the dark over mounds of bodies that didn't have that. I found a way out to the hangar deck. At the end of the stairs, the hatch had been closed and locked down. How do you get out? On the wall was what we called a battle lantern, a very heavy-duty lantern to use if the lights went out for some reason. I got it off the wall and I pounded it against that hatch. I guess you could have heard it to Okinawa. Somebody finally opened, and we climbed out. Only one guy made it behind us, he was a sailor. So, we had a ... a (unintelligible) of men stacked on, one on top of the other, that we climbed over to get out. It's that kind of experience that changes ... changes you into something else. And Mary's husband was right on the hangar deck; he'd



already started a fire hose. His squadron was not flying, and they lost pilots because of it. So, there are three of us trying to man a fire hose with a hundred and seventy-five pounds of water pressure (chuckles) flipping that thing around.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Caswell: We fought fire for four days.

Mike Zambrano: Four day?!

Mr. Caswell: Here she is! (Enters Mrs. Caswell). Just talking about your husband again.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles), oh, I'm ... thank you. I'm still working on it.

Mr. Caswell: (Chuckles).

Mrs. Caswell: I'll get you some more water. You want more? (Pause). Is that enough?

Mr. Caswell: Thank you.

Mike Zambrano: Thank you. So, for four days ...

Mr. Caswell: Well, we kind of got off your ... your pattern there for a minute.

Mike Zambrano: Well, we're covering stuff, we're covering stuff. You said for four days the crew fought fires on the Bunker Hill?

Mr. Caswell: I said what?

Mike Zambrano: That ... that the crew fought the fires on the Bunker Hill for ... for days?

Mr. Caswell: For four days, uh hum. They had already abandoned ship, but nobody heard it.

Mike Zambrano: Did ... did ...

Mr. Caswell: It was a mess, and we were towed all ... all the way back to Ulithi by a heavy cruiser; that was three thousand miles because the engines were gone.

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum.

Mr. Caswell: And we sat at Ulithi and got a new engine, got one. And it took us two ... two months to get home.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Mr. Caswell: Went to Bremerton, Washington.

Mike Zambrano: Okay. Was ... on it's own power, on that one engine?

Mr. Caswell: On that one engine. Just as long as we get the hell out of there without being sunk!

Mike Zambrano: Right. So, does ... does the Bunker Hill eventually get repaired? Because it's pretty late in the war at this point.

Mr. Caswell: They tried to repair it we hear. They were unable to restore it as an operating aircraft carrier. They wound up trying to restore it as a cargo ship, and it did haul something to Europe, I think. But that's about all I know.

Mike Zambrano: And what happened to your ... what happened to 221?

Mr. Caswell: What happened to them?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, well what happened to your ... your fighter group?

Mr. Caswell: Well, we lost ... about half of those guys were 221. No! They were all 221. We lost half of them in the Pacific. By the way, that group (chuckle) broke a record for the Marine Corps. Thirty-six pilots shot down a hundred and eighty-seven airplanes, that's the reason I actually ... Mary, my wife, made that (showing item to interviewer) with a little bio on ... on each ... each member. All of them had fifteen or more ...

Mike Zambrano: Really?

Mr. Caswell: ... of the highest scoring Marine squadron in the history of the Marine Corps. And only one (pause) Medal of Honor.

Mike Zambrano: And that was James Swett?

Mr. Caswell: Jim Swett.

Mike Zambrano: So ... so, the Bunker Hill goes to Bremerton for repair; what happens to your air group? Do they ... do they stay on Ulithi and get reassigned or do they get sent back to the States?

Mr. Caswell: Uh, when I got back to the States? I think it was ... we had to go through Seattle, then we went to San Francisco, San Francisco to San Diego, and then back to El Toro. The Marine Corps didn't know what to do with us I'm sure. And by that time, the atomic bomb had been dropped.

Mike Zambrano: Hum. Oh ...

Mr. Caswell: Which was alright with me (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Oh! Now you reminded me of two questions. I ... I should have asked you this a long ago, but do you remember what you were doing when you heard that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Caswell: Uhm, yes. I was trying to enter the ... a ... a college so that I could go to school at night or go to school in the daytime and ... and work at night because I had this period of waiting. And my father trained me to be that way. I was really hep on education. I read everything I could get my hands on, didn't make any difference what the subject ... uh, (pause), I made straight A's most of the time in math and science. I ... so, I ... I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer; I'd liked airplanes ever since I was that big. In fact, my dad said the first word I said was airplane, an airplane flew overhead. True or not, I don't know. So, I ... I was already enrolled in Curtiss-Wright Tech on Glendale, California airfield, the building was when the Japs struck. And by that time, I had made application to Lockheed for a job. I was tired of being hungry.

Mike Zambrano: Do ... well, I know you were already back in the States, but do you recall what you were doing when you heard about the atomic bomb?

Mr. Caswell: When I heard about what?

Mike Zambrano: When you heard that the atomic bomb had been dropped.

Mr. Caswell: Uhm, (pause) I don't think I thought much about it; I really didn't care. I had an attitude problem after the ... after the war. There was a plot, that's what I call it, of ... of forming another squadron. They didn't have any more Corsairs; they had some F6F, Hellcats, and going back on a small carrier. That's all the Jap ... that's all the Navy had in those days at the end of the war, I think. But I got sent back to (chuckles) the desert again where I was raised a short time.

Mike Zambrano: So ...

Mr. Caswell: Then I asked ... I had applied for a regular commission, and I was approved for that. So, they had to do something with me when they were realigning the peace time corps of pilots and everybody else, I guess. They put me on a military leave of absence.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Caswell: So, I went trout fishing up in Maine. As far away as I could get from everything and everybody. I don't think I thought too much about it, is about what I have to say. I was doing my very best to forget everything, and to try

to get a hold of myself. I'd tremble (pause), just been a hell of a lot ... been through a hell of a lot, and I didn't like me. But that kind of trauma we see it a lot in the newspapers.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah.

Mr. Caswell: They never talk about the pilot. Piloting military aircraft today, as I understand it, is a totally different program; training's different, the equipment is different, the missions are different. The last time I heard, we had a very modern fighter shooting down a Russian fighter – no pilot, it was directed out of Philadelphia; it's true, I checked on it.

Mike Zambrano: When was this?

Mr. Caswell: So, we are able to do things now that we never thought of then back in my day. This ... what you and I have been talking about this morning was one hell of a long time ago.

Mike Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Caswell: A *long* time ago. I stayed in the Marine Corps thirty years. I got promoted to General. I turned it down 'cause I had six kids. One of them had already joined uh, (pause) name escapes me. I'm ... I'm losing my mind anyway. Uh, (pause) I turned down the promotion because I had to raise those kids, and my wife had been ill about fifteen years with some sort of head problem; they still don't know what ... what it was. It ... really my duty, I was chief of staff of all Marine Headquarters, recruit training at Parris Island for two years. I ... I won't go through my career; I had a big ... a big career. But I ... I did not accept the ... the brigadier general, and I've never been sorry.

Mike Zambrano: Was it that they wanted you to return to Vietnam or to make you do another tour or ... is ... is that ...

Mr. Caswell: No, I was on a fast pace; I was ... I was everything that they wanted – someone highly dedicated. You can't raise children that way.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, it would be difficult. Uhm, so thirty-eight years?

Mr. Caswell: So, I came to ... a lot of that ... might jump in a brand new car that could hold six people including my wife.

Mike Zambrano: (Chuckles).

Mr. Caswell: Came here, didn't know a soul, but I came here because I thought the educational system that we have here in Austin was probably as good as I was going to find anywhere. I think I was right except for the drug business.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: There was a lot of drugs even then.

Mike Zambrano: What year did you get to Austin?

Mr. Caswell: 1968. Built this house, lived in it ever since.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, I was going to ask you that next. So, you've been here ... so '32 ... like over fifty years.

Mr. Caswell: Uh hum.

Mike Zambrano: You ... you ...

Mr. Caswell: And what you're seeing her is my wife's design. She ... calls it the ready room.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Caswell: (Laughter).

Mike Zambrano: I see a lots of ... lots of books. I ... I love your ... your plane models up there.

Mr. Caswell: Well, I've flown fifty-six different kinds of airplanes.

Mike Zambrano: I read once that once you were qualified on all fighters at the time?

Mr. Caswell: All fighters.

Mike Zambrano: So ...

Mr. Caswell: I had six fighter squadrons. One fighter air group. I had air groups (unintelligible). And was very proud of what I did. I trained some damned good pilots. I took twenty-two of them in the Crusader. You know what a Crusader looks like?

Mike Zambrano: Uh hum, yep, they're kind of a long front nose.

Mr. Caswell: Yeah.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah.

Mr. Caswell: I took the non-stop from Buford, South Carolina to the North Pole which is north ... northern part of Russia, uh, of, excuse me, Nor ... Norway. Nor ... Norway had complained to NATO that they had an agreement with America that we would furnish air support if the Russians came over the top again.

They had done it once before, long time ago. The Commandant of the Marine Corps was a member of the meeting that they made that complaint. So, he asked all of the armed forces of the United States, "Could they go up there without any navigation facilities at all?" The last radio station was up in northern (pause) northern Canada. Well, I had just trained twenty-eight, no twenty-two young pilots to be all-weather pilots for the Crusader. I was the ... I was an all-weather trained man after World War II; I liked it. I thought it was a good way to fight a war anyway. And we had just finished air refueling, so guess who got the job to go (chuckles) to try to air refuel all the way to the North Pole?

Mike Zambrano: You did.

Mr. Caswell: I did.

Mike Zambrano: How long did that take?

Mr. Caswell: We air refueled nine times and landed at a little airfield in northern Norway above the Arctic Circle called Bodo, B-o-d-o. No one had ever done that before. I was a Lieutenant Colonel for about three years before that, commanded the ... I guess that was my sixth squadron. We had a hell of a lot of fun. Air refueled nine times. And when we got there, they were overcast with rain and we made ... are you acquainted with flying the tech hand approach, GCAs and things like that?

Mike Zambrano: No, not that.

Mr. Caswell: Anyway, we ... we started our approach over a ten-thousand foot mountain with seven degree of glide slope and hit the runway; they had a twelve thousand foot runway because of it. And I turned right around a month later after showing them that we could support them in the air and did the reverse. I got back and they gave me the Full Colonel (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: Now where was it in the United States that you flew out from?

Mr. Caswell: Pardon?

Mike Zambrano: Where was it that you flew out from?

Mr. Caswell: Buford, South Carolina.

Mike Zambrano: Buford?

Mr. Caswell: I had a marvelous career. I hated to leave it, but I did ... I've never been sorry.

Mike Zambrano: When was the last time you flew?

Mr. Caswell: When I was eighty years old. I ... I bought my own airplanes afterwards, and started my own business, ran it for forty years and eventually I gave it to my oldest son.

Mike Zambrano: What was the business?

Mr. Caswell: It's ... just call it the money business – the health trust funds. Large companies manage large amounts of money. Mainly to make sure that it wasn't drug money.

Mike Zambrano: And your ... does your son still ... still run it?

Mr. Caswell: Am I still at it?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, oh, does your son still run the business?

Mr. Caswell: Oh yeah! He's ... he's made it into something I never would have done. He's got a lot of people working for him. He's ... he's really a banker.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm ...

Mr. Caswell: They're all ... got master's degrees and University of Texas, all ... all of them, and different things.

Mike Zambrano: I'm guessing that you instilled the importance of education in each one of them just like your father had with you?

Mr. Caswell: I'm sure I was overly abundant with my desire to get them educated (laughter). No, I grew up that way. I didn't let them watch television. They had to read or do their homework. On Saturdays they could watch television, that's all. So, they were not raised on television. Television doesn't teach you anything.

Mike Zambrano: Yeah, agreed.

Mr. Caswell: That's good.

Mike Zambrano: Is there something that I ... I haven't asked you that maybe you'd like to ... to add?

Mr. Caswell: (Pause), well, were you going to ... I missed all ...

Mike Zambrano: Oh, I'm sorry. Is ... is there ... is there anything I haven't asked you during this interview that maybe you'd like to add, a story or some kind of experience?

Mr. Caswell: Well, the way I'd like to answer that is that (pause) up until about age thirty-five, it ... it was really a military effort on my part to get educated. Even my own high school days, I pointed my way to uh, an educated person in the aviation business. I ... I didn't mention it here, and I ... I don't necessarily desire that it be mentioned, but I learned to fly by myself from McAllen, Texas when I was in high school.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, so you actually flew before you went into the Marine Corps?

Mr. Caswell: Yeah, and I don't ... I don't pass that on. Uhm, I think I signed my name to a piece of paper that said I had ... I'm here to learn to fly or something like that (laughter). However, a life of making my own business very quickly by ... just by leasing an airplane. I used the airplane in business to go from point A to point B whenever I needed to so I could be home at night with the kids in this house. I raised those kids, yeah, right here.

Mike Zambrano: Uh huh.

Mr. Caswell: Had a big back yard that we have out there was a football field and a basketball field and a sand box and (chuckles) it was everything.

Mike Zambrano: Hum, well ...

Mr. Caswell: Belonged to the Rotary Club, uh, other business meetings.

Mike Zambrano: When ... when did you finally retire?

Mr. Caswell: At eighty.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, okay.

Mr. Caswell: I sold my last airplane which is covered up here by this chair, I guess, and I had a twin-engine Queen Air which my banker says, "You can't afford it, Dean." "Yes, I can." Hell, it was the maintenance I couldn't afford (laughter), very expensive. But I made myself ... I had a good retirement from the Marine Corps, and strangely enough, last year they gave me the brigadier general retirement without the promotion. There was a lot ... let them do that from time to time. They were just ... a ... a nice pat on the back.



Mike Zambrano: So, you get it, but it's not an official promotion?

Mr. Caswell: It ... I didn't ... I didn't take the promotion, no.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: Uh, pretty good reason for that. I retired as a ... as a colonel, but I'm on call. I could be called to duty today.

Mike Zambrano: Really?! Still?

Mr. Caswell: So, you know, there's a handle that goes with some of this stuff (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Caswell: I made a lot of good friends here in Austin and elsewhere. The bigger and better airplane I had, the more friends I had far away. I dealt with people that had lots and lots and lots of money.

Mike Zambrano: Hum.

Mr. Caswell: My best friend who was on the Bunker Hill with me became the CEO of ... of a large corporation; I'll think of it in a minute. And he retired from that and then became a multi-, multi-millionaire. He asked me to manage his ... his cash money he called it – seven-hundred and fifty billion dollars.

Mike Zambrano: Wow!

Mr. Caswell: I said, “No, thank you. I do not want to lose a friend.” (laughter)

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mr. Caswell: So, it's a ... it's been a good life.

Mike Zambrano: Just ... just one more question that came to mind. Since admiral ... since the Bunker Hill was Admiral Mitscher's flagship, did you ever have, by chance, run into him? Or, I mean, I'm sure you saw him around, but did you ever, at least, have the opportunity to say, “Good morning,” or something to him?

Mr. Caswell: To the Bunker Hill?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, to Admiral Mitscher.

Mr. Caswell: Let's see if I get the question right (chuckles).

Other Person: (Whispering), say, say it louder.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, since Admiral Mitscher was on the Bunker Hill, did you ever run into him?

Mr. Caswell: Who?

Mike Zambrano: Admiral Mitscher, Marc Mitscher.

Mr. Caswell: No, but the ... he could have been on the Bunker Hill when they raided Formosa.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, but ... but did you ever meet him, or did you ever ...

Mr. Caswell: No, I did not. (Speaking to Mrs. Caswell), come in, dear, we're just talking now.

Mrs. Caswell: Oh, you're just talking?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, we're still recording, but we're wrapping up.

Mrs. Caswell: Still recording. Admiral Mitscher, dear, was the flagship ... ran the flagship of the ...

Mr. Caswell: Did I ever *meet* him?

Mike Zambrano: Yes.

Mr. Caswell: Oh, I'm sorry that I missed ... missed that. My hearing is not all that good.

Mike Zambrano: That's okay.

Mr. Caswell: No, I did not. Once Task Force 58 was broken up, I'm sure he was given some sort of job somewhere, but he retired shortly thereafter and within two years he was dead.

Mike Zambrano: Right.

Mr. Caswell: Heavens! Graduating from flight school after World War I made him pretty aged. (Unintelligible).

Mike Zambrano: He looks really aged; he looks very aged in all those pictures.

Mr. Caswell: He was an old man.

Mike Zambrano: Well, I think that ... that pretty much wraps up the interview.

Mr. Caswell: That's good, that'll cost you five thousand dollars.

Mike Zambrano: Oh, I'll have the Museum send you a check.

Mr. Caswell: (Laughter).

Mrs. Caswell: Could I ... could I ask a question you might want to hear?

Mike Zambrano: Sure!

Mrs. Caswell: About the time there was no Marine Corps; I don't think many people know that, and Dean was right there when it happened. It's not a long story, but it's

... it blew my mind that there was no Marine Corps for about two or three weeks in the United States.

Mike Zambrano: Really?!

Mrs. Caswell: Did you hear me, dear?

Mr. Caswell: I heard you. This is all part of my long story.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Caswell: In ... in 19 ... I'm going to give you "an about date," '68.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Caswell: No, '45. Anyway, the war was over about five years. I was stationed with ... in a fighter squadron flying the F4U4s, a very late model airplane that's more powerful, etcetera, etcetera. We went to Puerto Rico as a squadron and then jumped to an island off of Puerto Rico. The name of the island escapes me at the moment. That island, at one time, on the part of Roosevelt, President Roosevelt was going to be a huge U.S. naval base. They just barely got started by building a runway and they stopped. Well, we flew over to that island ... I almost said it, this squadron of some thirty-five, forty ... forty pilots with Corsairs, by the way, and arranged for shipping to bring us supplies from somewhere, probably Jacksonville, Florida, to bring us supplies to that island so that we could operate for a month in ... in a naval exercise offshore. This was just before the ... no, it wasn't. I'll leave off that part. So, here's a squadron all by itself, nobody on the island, we found a place to land because it had a land ... a nice landing strip, we set up tents for a headquarters and waited for the ship to arrive with our food the next day which is what the timing was, and it didn't arrive. It didn't arrive the next week. Heavens! We had ... and I didn't have at that time, but we had pilots with wives, we had people that worked on the airplanes for us and supply people; they had wives all back at Cherry Point, North Carolina; they were supposed to get checks; they didn't get any checks; we didn't get any checks, and our commanding officer, I think he flew over to Puerto Rico, got on the telephone to call the air wing commander who I can't think of the name of, and said, "We have been stuck on this damned island for two weeks, nothing to eat, no paycheck, no

gas for the airplanes, no nothing! What's going on?" And the story was, "There is no Marine Corps." The Air Force was brand new, and they forced a big issue in Congress to get rid of the Marine Corps. They would take the airplanes into the Air Force, the Army would get our enlisted men, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. I even got a letter from the Air Force with a promotion later on; got held up in the mail somewhere. So, we had five-star, no, he was four-star then, general called Vandergrift.

Mike Zambrano: Okay.

Mr. Caswell: You ... General Vandergrift was the uh, Marine general that sat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There was a senator, the name escapes me now, but he was well known and he was Secretary of the Armed Forces of ... in some way. He was able to call a meeting of the full Congress and only the President can do that, but he did it and asked General Vandergrift to make a speech of why we should not lose the Marine Corps. I have it in my library here. One of the most famous speeches I have ever heard of why we should have a Marine ... Marine Corps. You know, the Marine Corps was the first armed force of the Continental Congress; they were before the Navy, before anybody else. But at the end of his speech, the entire Congress took a vote that the Marine Corps would ... would remain in service for a lifetime and never be disbanded.

Mike Zambrano: Uhm.

Mr. Caswell: In the meantime, we're still suffering nothing to eat. So, we had spiney lobsters to catch in the surf (chuckles).

Mike Zambrano: Were they any good?

Mr. Caswell: And we cooked those in barrels that used to have gasoline, but we washed them out.

Mrs. Caswell: And tell him all about the warm beer that the Army gave you.

Mr. Caswell: (Laughter), oh yeah. The Army was ... had ... had a unit on Puerto Rico and one of the big brewers on Puerto Rico that ... I guess they heard the story, but they sent us over a lot of warm beer, and we had the beer to eat with the spiney lobsters (chuckles), that's the story.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mrs. Caswell: I love their story.

Mike Zambrano: So then, no Marine Corps for two weeks?

Mr. Caswell: Three, it was actually three.

Mike Zambrano: Three? Ah, okay, well ...

Mr. Caswell: That's about it.

Mike Zambrano: That's about it. I just want to say thank you for your service, sir.

Mr. Caswell: (Chuckle), you're welcome.

Mike Zambrano: Thirty-eight years is a long time to devote to one organization. Ah!

Mr. Caswell: Well, this is my last one.

Mike Zambrano: Your last?

Mr. Caswell: Int ... interview.

Mrs. Caswell; Well, he says that and then ...

Mr. Caswell: I'm not going to do that anymore.

Mrs. Caswell: And then he slides in there.

Mr. Caswell: Nothing, nothing against you. I think we had a good one.

Mrs. Caswell: Well, you're such a quiet, gentle personality, and I think that has a lot to do with why (unintelligible).

Mr. Caswell: Well, I am a little quieter lately (laughter).

Mike Zambrano: Well, if you want to add to it, I'm available at any time to do it. (Unintelligible).

Mr. Caswell: Okay.

Mike Zambrano: If ... if at any time you want to add to the current interview, it's not a problem, just come on by when you have time.

Mrs. Caswell: Did you hear that, dear?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, sorry. Uhm, if you want to add to the interview, it's not a problem for me to come back, so thanks.

Mr. Caswell: If I want to interview more?

Mike Zambrano: Oh, if you wanted to add to this interview.

Mr. Caswell: Oh, no. Uh uh.

Mike Zambrano: It's ... well, I'll just leave that option open to you.

Mrs. Caswell: It's an "if," dear.

Mike Zambrano: It.

Mr. Caswell: Yes, dear.

Mike Zambrano: (Laughter).

Mrs. Caswell: It's just an "if."

Mike Zambrano: Well, let me turn my recorder off here.

Mr. Caswell: Actually, I've enjoyed it.

(end of interview)

**FINAL** copy

CD – #OH05090 – Mr. Dean Caswell

Transcribed by: K. Matras

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