

INTERVIEW OF

Jack Kleiss

September 29, 2000

Mr. Nichols: Today is Friday the 29th of September, in the year 2000. I am Chuck Nichols and will be interviewing Retired Naval Captain Jack Kleiss, who has agreed to talk to us and give us some of his memories from his participation in World War II.

First of all, Captain Kleiss, we would like to know when and where you were born.

Captain Kleiss: I was born in Coffeerville, Kansas, on the 7th of March, 1916. Nobody has ever heard of Coffeerville but that is where the Dalton Gang drove in and didn't ride out. People there were very much interested in guns and my aunt was the shot-gun lady's champion of Kansas. So I like guns very much.

Mr. Nichols: And Coffeerville is in the southeast corner of Kansas? Almost in Oklahoma?

Captain Kleiss: Right. In fact, there was a South Coffeerville, Oklahoma, which was a pretty wild place.

Mr. Nichols: And who were your parents?

Captain Kleiss: My dad was John Lewis Kleiss and his wife, Lula Dunham Kleiss. My grandfather came from Germany and the question has been whether he was born on the ship or just after the ship arrived in the U.S.

Mr. Nichols: And your parents were born in Kansas?

Captain Kleiss: Well they were born - my father in Winfield, Kansas and my mother, I think, was born in Illinois. Near Lincoln, Illinois, probably, in that area.

Mr. Nichols: I know where Lincoln is, I am from Illinois. And what did your parents do? Were they farmers or were they city people?

Captain Kleiss: My dad started out with the railway, but then he started into the insurance business and stayed with that. But because he knew his railway friends, I used to get to ride in the cab.

Mr. Nichols: And did you have any siblings, or were you an only child?

Captain Kleiss: I have a brother and sister. One in Lubbock and the other one in Irving.

Mr. Nichols: So they migrated to Texas eventually.

Captain Kleiss: They came here early. In other words they came here practically after World War II.

Mr. Nichols: Did you go back to Kansas?

Captain Kleiss: In the 1930's almost anyplace was home. (at this place the tape seemed to be turned off and on again - there was a skip in the talking) We stayed in West Virginia for awhile because I had some duty in Washington, D.C. I couldn't stand the things that were going on in Washington, D.C. Some of them saying this is what we do; this is what we say. So 100 miles west of there I bought a whole bunch of land. Way out from anybody and the land was very cheap.

Mr. Nichols: Did you go to school in Coffeerville?

Captain Kleiss: Yes, I went to school in Coffeerville, the high school. I passed the Naval Academy before I finished high school. I had a chance to get a Solomon-Summerfield-ship at Kansas University. I could see World War II coming down the line. That was back in 1932. So I decided that was where I wanted to go....

Mr. Nichols: Did you get a degree when you graduated from the Academy? Or what did they give you?

Captain Kleiss: They gave me a degree, a Bachelor's Degree in Electrical Engineering. Then later on, the Navy sent me to Cal Tech and I got a Master's Degree in Science and a Professional Engineering Degree in Aeronautical Engineering.

Mr. Nichols: Well, the Navy was good to you

There was another skip in the tape - maybe it was turned off and not turned on at the right time...I am picking up where the tape does...

Captain Kleiss:bags and put his way in. With that kind of confidence, I made, I think seven perfect carrier landings and so then it was down hill from then on.

Mr. Nichols: And what was considered a perfect landing? Grabbing the third cable? Was that ideal?

Captain Kleiss: Well, on the first landing making any landing...

Mr. Nichols: Just hitting the deck...

Captain Kleiss: In other words, they cleared everything ahead of the ship to give you a chance that if you missed, you could take off and keep on going. Now after that, then you put a barrier barricade in the middle of the ship and you weren't going anyplace. But I did watch one fellow that came there making his first carrier landing. He made, I think, it was like five landings and the landing signal officer waved him off violently. The next landing he came in and the carrier landing waved him off again. But he took a cut and landed. His wheels set down and popped and right over the brink he went, right over the landing.

Mr. Nichols: It is always the man with the paddles.

Captain Kleiss: The paddles, right. So the plane was lost. It was an F-4F plane. Ronald J. Hoyle was

the fellow's name. A destroyer picked him up. Of course the plane was lost. Captain Murray was asked, the Captain of the Enterprise, how do we put this on the log. He puts down there "Ensign Ronald J. Hoyle landed aboard for duty at such and such a time, then just exactly one second later, detached." You want him back, NO.

Mr. Nichols: Did you have nets or wires strung across the forward part of the deck in case you missed the cables. And didn't the side of the carrier you would run into the net to stop the airplane.

Captain Kleiss: Well, he bounced and went over the side even before he got to that point.

Mr. Nichols: But you did have net or safety wires or something stretched across the deck.

Captain Kleiss: I think for the practice landings like that, they didn't have those up. So in other words, they had a great big wire that was going to stop the landing gear. So it would cut the landing gear off the flight. Then the rest of the plane would go down there and then they had this barricade. It was going to stop all of the planes that were ahead of the ship. On that one, for the practices, they left that off.

Mr. Nichols: And this was before the days of catapults for take-offs.

Captain Kleiss: Well they did have one catapult on the Enterprise. I watched that one. It was on the hangar deck. Of course, the hangar deck is 30 feet lower than the flight deck. The catapult went over to the port side, just not too far above the water. It was probably about 30 feet above the water. I watched this pilot get into this plane, I think it was an SBD. They launched the catapult and you could look at the pilot and see that he in that instant it didn't feel right, so he put on his brakes. He stopped before he got to the edge of the ship. All the other ones, I think, they had landed the planes, but they all landed in the water.

So they took that catapult out and threw it away. Never had a catapult after that on the Enterprise.

Mr. Nichols: How long was your flight deck? About 800 feet?

Captain Kleiss: 800 feet. Right. And usually the scouting six, which was ours, we were always at the front. In other words, the fighters were sometimes ahead of us. Any of the others, the bombing six or the torpedo planes, we were up in the front. If we were lucky we had 300 feet for take off. With heavy bombs, usually you would go off the bow, and you would drop and then with support you get between the ground or the ocean and the wings, you would make your cut, they thought after that.

Mr. Nichols: How long did you stay at Pearl?

Captain Kleiss: After the Battle of Midway. That was our home port there. That was in May that I went and joined the ship. We immediately went to Pearl Harbor in May of 1941.

Mr. Nichols: Then the Enterprise was at sea when the Japanese actually attacked Pearl Harbor?

Captain Kleiss: Well, yes. In November of 1941, we had a lot of serious training. We had executive officer, Earl Gallaher, was very insistent that we do a lot of dive-bombing practice. And that we glide bomb at night. We would fly our 18-plane formations at night without any lights. The only thing on glide bombing we would drop a couple of flares in the ocean and come down. For that we would use

some lights until we joined up. We were always close enough to the next plane so you could give little hand signals with a flashlight or use some other means.

What happened there is that in the middle of the night, we left Pearl Harbor. As usual they never told us where we were going or what we were going to do. So as soon as we landed on board, the Enterprise kept going into the wind. We waited a little bit and pretty soon, Major Putnum and his 12 F4F's came on board. They were making their first carrier landings.

Mr. Nichols: This was a Marine Major?

Captain Kleiss: The Marines. Yes. VMF-211, if I recall. These people talked to us. "Well, we are just going to be here overnight. Just to get some training. Then fly back to _____(unknown word)." They no sooner had gotten into the ready room, though, when Major Putnum says "Your orders have been changed, you are heading for Wake. That is your permanent duty." We dropped them off at Wake.

In the meantime, with all this stuff with the Japanese going on. We kept looking for them. Great big flights everyday. As soon as we dropped the Marines, one of the pilots thought he saw some ships in the distance. He thought that might be some of the Japanese fleet. But it turned out not to be. About that time, Admiral Halsey says "we are going to go back to Pearl Harbor and we will be in Pearl Harbor on the sixth of December." This was in 1942.(Is this right?) Shortly after that, the weather got very bad. About that time on the 28th of December (Note: should this be November?), Admiral Halsey came out with his declaration of war, saying that anything we sighted that was Japanese or German, was an enemy. Or words to that effect. So everything that we saw out in the ocean, if we saw a tin can, we thought that was a submarine that was going to shoot us. If we saw a little smudge on the ocean horizon, we thought that was a battleship or an aircraft carrier.

Because of this heavy storm that we ran into, one of the four piper destroyers broke a seam in this really rough sea. One of the cruisers had a problem because a line was dropped overboard and got entangled in one of their propeller shafts. We had to stop so a diver could go down to fix that. So that put us a day late.

Then Admiral Halsey says that we are arriving on the 7th of December. Now from that time, of course, all of the guns on aircraft were fully loaded with service ammunition. All the torpedoes were loaded. All the anti-craft were ready to go in an instant. We said that now when we get to Pearl Harbor, we will be able to take a little bit of rest.

We continued on there, always coming almost due east coming into Oahu. On the morning of the 7th, we continued to make these tremendous searches looking for the Japanese. Making at least 90 degrees wide angle ahead of the ship in little sectors. Usually with about 9 different sectors, with two planes each looking for the Japanese. As we were getting closer to the land there on the morning of the 7th we launched 15 SBD's from scouting six and three planes from _____ six and sent them out this 60 degree wide angle sectors just ahead of the ship.

Three of us from scouting six were left onboard on a submarine watch. We would drop depth charges on any submarine that we saw. Then as soon they came back on this warning stint, we were called into the ready room. They said "Pearl Harbor is under attack." We were told that the destroyer Ward had

reported that it was firing at a Japanese submarine. Then we were told to watch out for any Japanese aircraft. Someone said “what’s the ensign”. They said that they didn’t know whether it is a skull and crossbones or whether it has circles. Then they immediately took six of us from scouting six through bombing six and said that “here’s a target that is supporting midget ships that are approaching Pearl Harbor.” We went out to that area and the weather out there was perfectly clear. We could see for 50 miles in all directions. And we made a great big _____ (unknown word) and couldn’t find a thing.

Then we got back together. I said “this just has to be a practice drill and somebody could really get hurt if we saw a ship down here and knew it was here. We might even hit an American ship if someone definitely told us this was a Japanese ship.” Then we started hearing all sorts of reports like there are 21 ships flying American flags that are bombing Barber’s Point. We still wondered what was going on. So I tuned my radio station on Radio Honolulu. They were playing Sweet Lilani. I tuned in on the China Clipper place at the base there and they were telling “fight so-in-so, wind so-in-so, normal landing”. So I said that boy this is crazy, somebody could get hurt in this drill. Just about that time I heard “for Christ’s sake get that son of a bitch on our tail. He is shooting real bullets.” I recognized the name and knew that this was for real. Then we came back to the carrier. Again we made searches. About that time they told us that while we were out, that they had received message from Herman Gonzalez, who was on the northern sector of our final search coming in.

Mr. Nichols: Who was Herman Gonzalez?

Captain Kleiss: Gonzalez was in the bombing six and his radio transmission “don’t shoot, don’t shoot, this is an American”. That was the last that was heard from him. We learned a little bit later that he was the first one that was shot down in any of our group. The other pilot that was with him, saw the Japanese fighters coming. The Japanese were coming from the north. We were coming from the west. That is why Herman met them at that point. The rest of the squadron, after they completed, were to assemble at Barber’s Point and then go en mass and land at Ford Island.

The group commander and another plane landed early. They landed ahead. I guess they landed just about the time the major bombing was going on and they got away with it. By the time the rest of the group was at Barber’s Point, all the anti-aircraft guns were starting to operate. So Gallaher said “we are going to stay out here and circle for a while until things settle down a little bit.”

Then it was decided instead of going the normal way they would come in, they would scoot down right over tree-top level and land right at the field. That worked pretty well. A lot got bullet holes in them. On the other hand, there were about 1/2 dozen of the squadron that were shot down and killed near Barber’s Point. About three of the planes were lost, but the pilots parachuted and were safe.

Mr. Nichols: There were a number of casualties?

Captain Kleiss: Oh yes. That day we lost about 1/2 of our planes were either damaged or lost.

Mr. Nichols: On the Enterprise.

Captain Kleiss: On the Enterprise, yes. So as soon as they landed, the Japanese stopped all their bombing. Our aircraft guns would shoot at anything in the air. They went out in these big flights. Earl

Gallaher went out 175 miles looking. They were looking a little bit too far to the south than where they should of. So then one of the pilots said that he had located some of the Japanese ships and we were given an order to send the torpedo planes after them.

They took six of us, three from bombing six and three from scouting six with a thousand hydro fluoric acid smoke tanks. This would make smoke for the torpedo planes and we were told how to do that. As it was starting to get towards dusk, they loaded us all off. We were to stay just to the stern of the torpedo planes. But the old antique TBD's with their 2,000-pound torpedoes could only make about 100 knots. We had to make violent S-turns on top of them. The six of us that were carrying these big smoke tanks. There were six fighters that were on top of the group and they had to make violent S-turns also.

We kept on going, there was rain. All this now was without any lights at all on the torpedo planes. It was really bad going into the clouds and squalls.

Mr. Nichols: No mid-air collisions?

Captain Kleiss: No. We didn't lose a single one on the whole flight. Then we had to come back.

As we came back the fighters, with all their maneuvering they had to do, they were running out of fuel. As soon as they got near the ship, they received a message from the ship that they were to land at Ford Island. They didn't want to have the ship lighted up for the landings because there were Japanese submarines every place.

Mr. Nichols: At Ford Island, you can see into the harbor.

Captain Kleiss: Just in the very center of Oahu. A long time ago the Army Air Force used to call that Luke (is this right) Field. It is just an island right in the center. You go into the channel and you make a regular circle and come back and Ford Island is right in the center. That is where we landed.

They were told to land there. They saw the planes coming in and the anti-aircraft just clobbered them. Three of the pilots were killed. One plane made it safely by going just right along ground level, with no lights. The other two made it but they wrecked the planes.

We came back to where we thought the ship was. We had to do all this navigation. There was no radio, it was all dead-reckoning at night. So we came back to where we thought the ship would be. When we got there, we couldn't see the ship. Norm West, one of our three planes, put down his search light. Everybody said "Oh, he sees the ship." So everybody joined him. He just started circling a little bit. We wondered what he was doing that for. Then pretty soon, we saw off in the distance, maybe 20 or 30 miles we saw one search light go up in the air.

They said they didn't want to lose all of their airplanes. So they turned on the search light just once. And we landed. Here we were carrying these heavy hydrofluoric acids which made it interesting.

Mr. Nichols: You still had those aboard the aircraft.

Captain Kleiss: We didn't drop a thing. We always brought back everything. We landed the SBD's with the smoke tanks then came the torpedo planes. Quite a number of those people had never made a

night carrier landing. Here they were with these live torpedoes. They landed. Not a single one of them blew a tire.

There was one little innovation in there. One pilot landed a little rough and the torpedo plane broke from its fittings and fell down on the deck and just started scooting along. A live torpedo. Because of the jolt the torpedo was armed. Any bump and whamo. Lt. Townsend saw this torpedo and he hopped onto it just like you would a bucking bronco. He put his feet here and he put his feet there and brought it to a safe stop. He put his heels down to slow it down. The ordinance man came and disarmed it.

That was the only problem. Some of the other planes that had been from the island looking for the Japanese came back. They saw all this stuff going on at Ford Island and decided not to land there. So they went over to K_____ across the mountains. The field was all darkened but they had to land someplace. They had night vision. So they landed in the field with it all darkened. That was Bucky Walters and Ben Tramel (is this right), The guards came up there with tommy guns shouting "You can't land here. This field is closed." At daylight they went out to look at the field, there were trucks, there were bulldozers. They could never have made that field if they had seen where they were landing.

The thing that really amazes me is that the Japanese didn't do the real damage things that they should have done. Like take out all of the fuel tanks, or take out the repair facilities and the other things which really would have hurt us lot more than the battleships.

Mr. Nichols: Fortunately, they didn't make one more run.

Captain Kleiss: Yeah. In 1988, I was at a conference and Yashita (is this right) was there. As I recall, he was the senior aviator and because the Admiral would not allow him to make the next flight, he stayed in his quarters for a month. Despondent. I think the whole thing was because the Enterprise was there. They were told they were not going to have any aircraft carriers. They saw that one. They figured that if there was one, there might be more. They left. If they had taken out the fuel tanks, the Enterprise only have 50% fuel left, the cruisers 30%, the destroyers 20%. There was only one tanker that was out at sea.

Mr Nichols: And the Enterprise was the only one that made it back to Pearl before all of the so-called action stopped every other carriers that were still at sea or enroute.

Captain Kleiss: Well they were not in the vicinity. The Enterprise was the only one there. When they figured that was not exactly what was planned, well, maybe there was something else. Except for that one day loss in schedule, we would have been there. On Time Magazine, they had a little plane. They were showing the map and there was an "X" right over Berth Box 9, where the Enterprise should be. So that was a target.

Mr. Nichols: So did the Enterprise stay at Pearl then until the Battle at Midway, or did you put back to sea and do scouting missions and things such as that?

Captain Kleiss: Well, as soon as this was over. We stayed out until we were sure the Japanese were gone and then we came in. Finally loaded in there for awhile. The next thing we did was to attack Wake and then we went to Kwajalein and really clobbered that one. That is where I got the Distinguished

Flying Cross. That was a little interesting thing there.

There was a cruiser that was at the dock.

Mr. Nichols: This was a Japanese cruiser?

Captain Kleiss. Oh yeah. It was in sort of a little atoll there. Then right ahead of it was a radio station. I got to use my 50-calibers for a hit. There was a barracks and people flying around. My gunner, John Snowden, had a chance with his twin-caliber, 30-caliber guns. He was a wonderful shot. He was the best in the world. We had a fine time until we got to the edge of the atoll and we were starting to head out to make the turn and go back to the carrier. But just as we cleared there, here three fighters came at me. I gave John Snowden the usual shot that he would get. One particular shot he could usually get in 5 to 10 seconds. I gave him that perfect shot and he was very steady. The fighter still kept coming on. I didn't hear any sound. Pretty soon I saw little flicks of stuff coming out of the plane and then finally both starboard tanks were lost and there was a great big white bunch of gasoline. I looked back and he was back there, he had been hurt a little bit.

I needed to do something. I didn't want to live out in the middle of the Pacific without my wife, without my family. So I did some really acrobatic maneuvers and ended up very quickly. So now we were head to head with this guy. I think I hit him pretty well. Of course, then I was looking at the other two. They saw what was going on and they turned away.

Mr. Nichols: Were these Zeros?

Captain Kleiss: Yes, three Zeros.

Mr. Nichols: And you got one at least.

Captain Kleiss: Well, last I saw of him, he was heading away. I don't know whether I damaged him. At that point, I had so many problems. I was getting a lot of water on the windshield. Every once in a while, going back to the carrier, and I knew that losing 1/2 of my gasoline, that was going to be really tough. Of course, the moral of this story is that regardless of how you are on this situation, your gunner is, as I found out later, out of ammunition. He had a shell hit him behind his back and he was in pain. I lost 1/2 of my gasoline and I had used most of my ammunition _____ (unknown word) to bring down this fighter. I was just practically down to a handful of 50 caliber.

So all those planes had to do was to mess with me for five minutes and I would have been lost. Just never give up, just pray to the good God above to give you a little help.

Mr. Nichols: And how old were you?

Captain Kleiss: That was '42; I was 26, I guess.

Mr. Nichols: How old was your gunner?

Captain Kleiss: He was five years younger. We are still in touch. We are the only team that is left of Scouting Six. I believe, and probably, of the whole air craft carrier. That goes back to the Pearl Harbor

attack.

I was the best man at his wedding.

He finally went into aviation as a Lieutenant Commander when he retired. He is a wonderful person. He is one that you would not want to fight a dueling _____ with him. When he retired after his Navy experiences, he went as Chief of Police on the east side of Seattle. They had an Annie Oakley that they thought was really super. They insisted that he try the fellow out. The fellow took the .45 and shot at a target and he shot somewhere in the middle 80's. John Snowden took the gun and shot a 97. He was amazing wonderful fellow.

Mr. Nichols: Where were you when the Battle of Midway began? I am sure you were on the aircraft carrier at the time.

Captain Kleiss: Well, it really starts out again with the Marines just like before Pearl Harbor. We were taking a group of Marine fighter pilots to _____. As we approached _____, and this was of course after the Doolittle raid.

As we approached _____, the Coral Sea was in progress. We were told that as soon as we landed the Marines, ourselves and the Hornet were to go and help the Yorktown and the Lexington in the Coral Sea.

Mr. Nichols: Where was _____ in relation to Kwajalein or Wake or even to Midway?

Captain Kleiss: Well, it's fairly close to the Coral Sea. We would have gone there directly if we didn't have the Marines. We could have probably gotten in there right at the tail end of the Battle.

When the Japanese saw that here was the Enterprise and the Hornet that were coming right into the Coral Sea. They saw what had happened with the Doolittle raid. They didn't quite know what we might have on board. They immediately left the area and skedaddled.

Then we did a crazy thing. In stead of staying away from Islands like we always did, we started going pretty close to them. Close enough that we were going to be seen but not make it obvious. We even let one Japanese scout plane come so it could see us. Soon as he got good sight and turned away, we didn't do anything. So then, we headed directly back to the States.

The idea was, as they told us. We didn't find this out until we got back. (At this point the tape ended).

(Now picking up on the back of the tape.)

Well, anyway we heard that the Japanese claimed that they had sunk both the Lexington and the Yorktown. We arrived at Pearl Harbor. Finally the Yorktown showed up. We were just loading up and Yorktown went into place to get repaired. Then as soon as we left port, we were given the whole story.

Mr. Nichols: And the Yorktown was supposed to take three months to repair and Nimitz gave them 72 hours?

Captain Kleiss: That or 24 hours.

Mr. Nichols: I know he gave them a very short time to get that ship repaired and back at sea.

Captain Kleiss: Anyway, we took off and they told us exactly what was going to happen. That we were going to stay in ambush. When the Japanese came, then we would clobber them as they arrived in the area.

Mr. Nichols: And it was the code breakers on....

Captain Kleiss: The Nimitz Staff finally solved the riddle as to what was the island by sending out a fake message that they were running out of fresh water. That was indicated that it was Midway. Of course, the Japanese thought that they had sunk both the Yorktown and the Lexington. The Lexington almost made it. A second fire finally took some ammunition to bring her down. The Yorktown was really, really damaged.

Anyway, we were out there waiting for a day or two. Then finally the Yorktown arrived and then the one that was out there, not exactly with us, but nearby. We were told that maybe this was going to happen on the 3rd or whatnot. On the 3rd, we were all set and ready to load, ready to go at an instant notice right from the very start on the 3rd of June.

Then there was no contact, no anything. All of the contacts were to be done out Midway, either by the Marines or by the Army Air Corp and their B-17's or some of the others. They would have no idea of the aircraft carriers move or not to make any flights that might be observed.

Finally towards evening, we received this message "enemy sighted" and then after that one, we were all listening and ready to go. Main body. Boy, we were all set and we had all the wind and all the other information ready to go in that five minutes. And Admiral Nimitz sent the message. It had to be relayed through Alaska to us. The message read "this is not your target." So then they told us to start out tomorrow early.

That morning, they gave us steak and eggs. Every time you had steak and eggs on the aircraft carrier you knew that was going to be a rough, rough day. We were all set ready to go early in the morning and finally we got this message from the PBY pilot. It said "several aircraft carriers located latitude so-in-so, longitude so-in-so, course so-in-so, speed so-in-so. Notify next of kin." I am not really sure whether that was said or not. We thought it was.

We knew exactly where we were going then. Wade McClusky, the group commander, immediately launched all of the planes. Before this had happened, we had one Japanese plane that came overhead. It was just right on top of us above the clouds. We thought we had been sighted.

Mr. Nichols: Was this a Japanese scout?

Captain Kleiss. Yes, Japanese scout. A little bit later another Japanese plane came pretty close. Wade McClusky figured "boy they have seen us. It is just a question of who is going to hit who first." So he launched 16 of our SBD's. The other two weren't working. The bombing six. I think they loaded

fifteen. We took right off and were ready and we circled around waiting for the Yorktown to have their dive bomber planes join us altogether. We were too far away to launch any fighters or any torpedo planes.

We circled for 1/2 an hour waiting for the Yorktown to come out there. We knew time was wasting and we were doing this thing right at the end of our fuel if we really hurried to get there.

The reason they couldn't get their planes out was because of their battle damage to one of their elevators.

After 1/2 hour, we scooted up to the north. We anticipated that they would keep their course and speed and get right at that spot when we would arrive there. We arrived at the spot and it was nice area. We could see for fifty miles. Nothing there. We figured that maybe they had gone a little faster than we did. So we went to another place where they might be - not there. So then McClusky figured "well, they must have reversed course." So we came back.

Pretty soon, there was a destroyer and he was going full speed. They were turning back to get back into position. Sure enough, we looked there and here were three aircraft carriers close and 20 miles away was another one. McClusky says "Dick you take the one on the left, Earl and I will take the one on the right." Within two minutes, as we started our dive the one that was the closest was the Kaga and Dick Best took the Akagi. They were just like a haystack on fire.

Mr. Nichols: They were caught with all their planes on deck and all types of armament laying around the airplanes because they had not reconfigured their airplanes.

Captain Kleiss: The situation, as I heard it later on, was that all of the searches had been done except the one that was scheduled to go over right where the Enterprise was. But that plane malfunctioned and they had to send it out late. Then the fellow sending it out late was so careful to get back that he wasn't making a very good view of what was there with a few little clouds. So he missed it. He didn't even see it.

Then Naguma was sure that there were no aircraft carriers around, so he took all of the ammunition for the anti-aircraft carriers and used it to make some bombs and go back in and so some more damage against Midway. About that time Yamamoto called and says "these B-17's are hurting our transports out here." So we had been sparing the runways, now we have got to tear them out or else somebody's going to get hurt. The aircraft carriers were in the middle of going back. They had changed out from the torpedoes and the aircraft carrier stuff, back to the Midway. Now they had to change and put all of the bombs to go to the runways over there.

Finally about that time another plane found an aircraft carrier out there, maybe more. So they had to change again back to the items for hitting an aircraft carrier. So when we hit there I saw two bombs miss. Earl Gallaher was determined that he was going to get involved. He came in and hit the plane that was near the stern of the deck and it was just starting to move forward. His bomb landed right smack on top of it. These two incendiaries, 500-pound bomb, and 2-hundred pound incendiaries, just left and right. Immediately, this thing was a mass of flame 50 feet tall. They were probably gassing and this would be the first plane that would be coming out of the _____.

There were two planes ahead of me and I was so busy with mine that I didn't see where they hit. But I did notice the fire had gone up towards mid-ship. Now whether it was another bomb or bombs or

whatever, anyway the fire had moved forward against all the wind for some reason. Then the red circle right at fore of the ship was uncluttered and I put one right on top of it and my two incendiaries on top. I turned around and took a look and immediately it was just a great big bunch of fire. One of the authors said that this hit a large gasoline tank and forced this gasoline tank up underneath the bridge, which set up a great big fire.

At that point, I was a little bit busy, and here was a fighter coming at me. John Snowden got him or made him go away. Then another one came in and we got him. Then the anti-aircraft. I couldn't really see what was going on until I got far away.

But even when I got 10 or 20 miles away, I could see pieces of items of the ship going up the air a thousand feet high. A lot higher than I was, throwing these pieces up. Then I could see here were these two flames and here was the third flame over here. Now within two minutes our _____ were in massive flame and within less than two minutes more the third one was on fire. Now that was the Yorktown.

Of course one of the interesting things was that Earl Gallaher's plane, Adkins was in the rear seat with his twin guns. During the dive, the twin gun broke loose. So he was just holding it down. Three of the zeroes were after him. Adkins took this double barrel, this twin machine gun and used it just like a shot gun and he shot down this first one. The other two ran. Previously Adkins wasn't even able to hold the gun. He needed help to get it into the plane.

Well, we knew that we were right at the end of the fuel. In other words, with the speed that we had gone there, which used twice as much gas we normally would use, we knew that it was just touch and go to get back. So we had to go back 110 knots to get the best miles per gallon. As I headed back, I could see over parallel to us about 10 miles away, here was a big squadron. That was the Hiryu and they were coming to get the Yorktown.

I saw a bombing plane land in the water. They got out in a rubber boat. So I marked an X down for that one.

We came back to the ship. They saw me coming, thank goodness. I landed directly into the wind and had five gallons left. There were 8 of us that landed out of the whole group. Of the 16 that left, 8 of us came back. The most gallons left was 12. McClusky only had 2 gallons left. McClusky had been hit in the shoulder and he was afraid that if he messed up with his difficulty, he might mess up the flight deck. So he took a circle around the ship to make a turn just to make sure everybody else would make it safely.

Mr. Nichols: He practically dead stick.

Captain Kleiss: That is right. With only two gallons left.

By the time we got there, the Japanese had hit several bombs on the Yorktown. Some Yorktown pilots landed on our ship, some of them on the Hornet. Soon as we landed, here came the second group of the Hiryu pilots. Then we could see the dog-fight going on between our F4S and their planes.

While all of this was going on, our planes were being loaded on so we could go and get the third ship. Of the 8 planes, we were able to get 6 of them ready to go. The Bombing 6 was able to get 5. The rest of

them were the Yorktown planes that had landed. We immediately took off, a total of 24 planes, going toward the Hiryu. As I recall, we were at 19,00 feet. We came down some. It wasn't quite as nice as in the morning. In the morning, for the first time we never had any fighter opposition. Every other time on dive bombing, we had to watch out for them and do some wild things before you started your bombing. This time we had a little problem, but not too much.

We came in there and within just a few minutes, it was in flames. But not like the plane, because they didn't have all their fuel, their ammunition clicking off and blowing up and everything. The people at the rear saw the smoke and couldn't get a good target. So some of them they used on other ships.

We headed back to the carrier. The thing that we weren't sure whether that ship would be recovered or whatnot, it was on fire. If they had good means of damage control like ours, it just might be safe. We came back to the ship and we didn't lose a single plane of the 24 that went out. I don't think any of them were really injured.

As soon as we came on board and it was starting to get dark or dusk, then we headed away from the Japanese. We had received signal that regardless of consequences, take Midway at all costs. They had 18-inch battle cruisers. They were not allowed to have them, because they signed the Washington Conference like we did. We threw ours away. Our cruises had only 8-inch guns. And we didn't want to encounter them in the middle of the night with those 18-inch guns that were accurate at 23 miles. We headed back and it was a good thing we did, because we would have encountered them.

The next day we found out that they had left. We tried to catch up with them. Later on we learned the thing that probably might have been a factor in this thing.

Am I speaking too much? Am I making this too long?

Mr. Nichols: No just keep going.

Captain Kleiss: A big factor on this is that one of our planes. Most of our planes just ran out of fuel. The Third Division was never heard from anymore. They just ran out of fuel and took more fuel to the rear than it did at the front. But anyway, Flarhety (sp), one of our new pilots, and this Peter Guido (sp). The one that made my first carrier landing, he was in this plane with Flarhety (sp) and they ran out of fuel or something or maybe they were shot down. Anyway they had to land on the ocean. The Japanese picked them up on a destroyer.

The Japanese destroyers were very friendly with them. But then they sent an intelligence officer over there from one of the cruisers. He started questioning them. Of course, they could see this was coming up and knowing what happens, they figured they would get their story straight. Now what the prisoners of war told us is you had to tell the Japanese something. You couldn't just say "I won't talk" or you would be gone. But the Japanese would believe you if the two of them said the same story. So they cooked up a wonderful story. They waited till they were beaten a little bit and then they independently told. They asked about the Midway Island. Neither one of them had ever been near there. They had no idea where it was even if you pointed to it on the map. They told them, they had this many sea-planes, this many 5-inch guns all around there, they had this many groups, this many thousand marines. So this was sent up to Yamamoto. It was very possible because of this story that they gave them, they decided maybe they had better not try to take the thing by leveling it with their 18-inch guns.

And then after that, then they murdered Flarehty and Guido (spell names).

Mr Nichols: The two officers. They beheaded them? Some of the people were beheaded, I thought, that the Japanese had captured.

Captain Kleiss: Well, I am not sure whether they were beheaded or shot. They tried to get the destroyer crew to murder to them. They had a rough time. The people, these were nice people, I think finally an officer, they couldn't get an enlisted man to do it. So an officer, I don't know whether he shot him or whatever. But anyway they were executed, tied up and dropped into the ocean.

Of course, there is another story about Peter Guido (name spell) because the Wake Island this same gent had quite an experience there. Here were three Japanese bombers that were coming into the Enterprise. One was shot down by anti-aircraft. One saw how quickly they were shot down and he dropped his bomb short and flew away. The third one, I don't know what the situation, I think he may have received some damage. Anyway he was determined to fly directly on the ship and make as much devilment as he could. He came there and saw this plane coming in.....

TYPYST NOTE: this is were the tape was spliced after it broke.

continuing.....

started coming to the deck. All of the sudden here was this fellow on the end of the aircraft carrier thing right on the edge, he dropped into an SBD which was 6___7, I think. He was up there shooting at this guy coming in. The plane came in and it hit right on the edge of the deck. It chopped this plane right within a foot of where this guy was with the guns. Then this guy took the gun around and started shooting in that direction and the fellow went into the ocean.

It made a great patch of gasoline there from the fire because this plane hit on the edge of the deck. Somebody was out there putting out the fire. Admiral Halsey was up on the bridge and we were in the ready room right near there. Halsey says "send that man up to the bridge". So they went down there to find him. Nobody would tell us; nobody knows.

Admiral Halsey wasn't about to do that one, so he asked, where were you and who were you with, and so on. Finally it turns out it was Peter Guido. The admiral asked him "how come you didn't volunteer?" He says "somebody had to do it." Well Admiral Halsey, on the spot changed him from machinist to aviation machinist third class to first class.

So that was Peter Guido's story.

Mr. Nichols: I read somewhere that one of these carriers is the one that did the innovation of putting twin 30's on their _____ - that they normally did one 30 and somebody decided that they would put two 30-caliber guns in the back.

Captain Kleiss: We started out in the early part of the war they were just singles, and then they were changed to the doubles. The doubles were great. They did very well.

Then the next morning we looked after the night on this thing. We weren't sure that there was another carrier out there. One of these submarines or some information indicated that there was a aircraft carrier there. We did not know if that was the Hiryu that was really severely damaged or a totally undamaged one. We knew that the Japanese had a number of aircraft carriers that could have been in the vicinity.

Daylight we started looking for them. And we looked and looked and looked and the most we could find was one little cruiser. We bombed that one just near the deck. And this guy did everything right. The whole squadron, we didn't get a single hit. And he shot down one plane. The skipper on that thing did everything we could imagine right.

So the next day, we got a little bit closer and we ran across the Maguma (is this right?). It was a little strange there. When we got to the area there was supposed to be more ships there than we saw and as soon as we got there we wondered if this was the one we were after. We were after a particular ship that had a particular Japanese Admiral. So while we were circling there, we got this message, "this is not your target the target is 40 miles in a certain direction." Well we had plenty of time and plenty of fuel, and this sounded like an American talking; so we went there. Nothing in sight. Then we knew this was a false message. This was the only target we had around here. We started and I showed you that picture of the Maguma (sp) looked like.

There was another destroyer that got into when they did a little other devilment. This one there when we got back to the carrier, they sent Kroger and Kleodopsin (sp) back to take pictures and do the _____ of the remaining survivors on the Maguma (sp). He took those wonderful pictures and he said that he couldn't shoot those men, they were waving at me.

Mr. Nichols: Didn't we sink four Japanese carriers at the Battle of Midway.

Captain Kleiss: Yes.

Mr. Nichols: Three the first day....

Captain Kleiss: Three the first day and then in the evening we got the fourth one. So it was all on the first day. On the fourth one, we didn't even lose a single plane.

Mr. Nichols: And we lost our first six TBF's...

Captain Kleiss: The TBF's, they were obsolete planes. They were supposed to be taken up by the TBF's (is this right?). While I was at Pearl Harbor, they had a TBF there, one of the first ones that arrived. And I had a chance to fly it. It was a nice plane, nothing compared to the SBD's which you could almost dog-fight with them. This one was a very stiff airplane. I took it out myself. I had no problem. I understand that a couple of days later, another pilot and a passenger went out with it. The pilot came back all right, but the passenger was dead from carbon monoxide. That may have been one reason why the TBF's were delayed which were supposed to replace the SBD's earlier.

So then after the Mugami and the Nikuma episode, we had to drop back a little bit because all of the destroyers and cruisers were running a little bit late. So that lost a little time and then as soon as that was over then we were starting to go back to Dutch Harbor.

Mr. Nichols: And one of our submarines sank the Yorktown?

Captain Kleiss: Well, this was earlier than that. I think they sunk the Yorktown just a little bit - I would have to look in my log book to see exactly when it was.

Mr. Nichols: It was during the Battle of Midway that we sank the Yorktown?

Captain Kleiss: The Yorktown was at a tilt there and they had to abandon it. But then they managed to get everything changed so that they had it leveled. They tried to put a tow rope on it to pull it. The tow had a problem. I came back at night, I think that was after hitting that cruiser. Came back to where the Enterprise was supposed to be. Of course, this is without any lights and what not. The Yorktown and the Enterprise looked identical. Oh, boy this can't be the Enterprise I hope. By that time they had the YEZB that would give you a signal as to what sector you were in. So I used that to find the Enterprise.

That was totally deserted. They put the crew back and everything. Just by chance, I guess the submarine had a lucky shot at them and the destroyer. One of those freak things.

Mr. Nichols: Then you went to Dutch Harbor?

Captain Kleiss: Well, anyway as soon as we were given the destroyer some fuel and what not, then we started going to Dutch Harbor. But then we got a report that the Japanese had left and everything was ok there. So we headed back to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Nichols: Was this the same time that the Japanese took Sitka and Attu in the Aleutians? Hadn't they faked an attack up there hoping to draw our aircraft carriers up there....

Captain Kleiss: We were told by Admiral Nimitz, ahead of the attack. The first thing that was going to happen was they would attack Dutch Harbor with the intention of pulling all of the fleet out of Pearl Harbor and leading them up to that area. They were going to ambush them as they headed towards Dutch Harbor. So I think there were two aircraft carriers in that area for the Japanese.

After that, they decided that the whole thing was over. The Japanese were headed for home and no problems.

Mr. Nichols: You didn't actually go all the way to Dutch Harbor then?

Captain Kleiss: No, we headed that way and as soon as they had left permanently, then we went back to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Nichols: Were you in the Marianas Turkey Shoot or the Battle of Santa Cruz or ...

Captain Kleiss: No, as soon as we got back there, because we were down with all of the really experienced pilots. The ones that started out from Pearl Harbor on through all these other items there, we were down to just a handful of pilots that were left. Now we had some new pilots, replacement pilots, that came in.

The usual situation with replacement pilots is they made the first one battle they would be around with us. But we lost so many of them in the first battle. They were so busy just flying the airplane that they weren't turning their eyes around and every place else. So we had new pilots that continued, but they sent all of the old experienced pilots back to teach dive-bombing. At which I understand that the Japanese, especially after Midway were not able to really train experienced pilots in what to do or what not to do.

Mr. Nichols: Where was the Enterprise during the Marianas Turkey Shoot and the Battle of Santa Cruz? Wasn't the Hornet lost at the Battle of Santa Cruz?

Captain Kleiss: Since I wasn't there I couldn't give you any information on this. The destroyer that I was on, Tom Frazier, by that time he was in charge of groups of destroyers. At one time, after the Enterprise and these other groups were taking a lot of shots at the Japanese. They did a wonderful job, but then they had to get out of there to be safe because of a lot of things coming in. A lot of their surface leads. So Tom Frazier, his destroyer went into an almost suicide attack to stop these groups that were headed for the Enterprise and these other ships; stop them enough to get them out safely. So that was the end of him, he was lost in that battle.

Mr. Nichols: Where were you awarded your Navy Cross?

Captain Kleiss: The Battle of Midway.

Mr. Nichols: The Battle of Midway? Did you receive your DFC there also?

Captain Kleiss: No, I got that one at _____, That was an experience I had there.

Mr. Nichols: And after the Battle of Midway, after you got back to Pearl, did you leave the Enterprise then?

Captain Kleiss: Yes, they sent us back there. On the way, we did some target shootings like we always did. We would have us leave and then we would make gunnery runs on it just to keep our skills up. One of the planes coming in didn't know whether his guns would shoot if he did everything upside-down. So he did the whole attack this way and that way and everything. He did everything flying his SBD upside-down. Well, he found out that the guns shot perfectly, but the engines stopped. Fortunately, he was close enough to glide to the beach. He landed on the beach.

Then came the instructions and they named certain ones of us coming back that were eligible or scheduled to come back (Typist note: at this point the tape ended and the sentence was not finished.)

Mr. Nichols: Ok, let's continue on here.

Captain Kleiss: Anyway this fellow that did these maneuvers on the sleeve using his guns and his airplane totally upside down. The engine quit and he landed on the beach. This information had come out that so-in-so are eligible to go on this ship leaving Honolulu at such and such a time, just a few hours ahead. If you are able to be on board, then you will be headed for the United States. Because he was out there with his airplane, he missed.

The rest of us came back with the ship and landed in the United States.

My fiancée and I got married. When we came back from our honeymoon, having a few weeks of leave, there were orders to go to about ten different places. Some of the orders had been changed and modified by other orders. So I went to Brigham Young, who was the original group commander, who happened to be in charge of the base at San Diego. I handed him this bunch of orders and said “where do I go?” He looked at them and said “the only thing I know is to send you and your wife on orders to Washington D.C. and see Old Rags up there. Well, Ragsdale, my friend and he will look them over and tell you where to go.

So we weren’t allowed enough gasoline to take, she had a car and I had a car. We had to leave those in Long Beach and go on the train. Then they sent us to Norfolk, for dive-bombing there and then down to Cecil Field in Jacksonville for dive-bombing there.

Then I wanted to get into Aeronautical Engineering. I got a recommendation from Admiral Halsey and I think one from Admiral Nimitz, too, as well as a couple of other skippers. They sent me to post-graduate school at Annapolis and then to Cal Tech and so I got my degree.

I had some experiences in that one. I guess the most important one was I was in charge of catapults and arresting gear for the Bureau of Aeronautics. On the new Enterprise, CVN65, there was a problem of what to use on the catapults. The old hydraulic catapults were a mess. They just weren’t very good.

Mr. Nichols: Was this about ‘43 or ‘44 when they launched the new Enterprise?

Captain Kleiss: I think it was more towards 1950.

Mr. Nichols: Oh it was that late.

Captain Kleiss: I was on the Staff of Tom _____

Mr. Nichols: I know it was the Essex that was launched back in ‘43-’44 in that area.

Captain Kleiss: I was there while this one was being launched. I was in the Air Force Atlantic Fleet in charge of maintenance for the aircraft.

_____ Mitchell of Great Britain came over and we talked about his steam catapult. The Naval Aircraft Factory in Philadelphia was the one that was building catapults and the arresting gear.

Their catapult just had a lot of problems. So we checked this thing out and decided to put it on the new Enterprise. The big problem was that with the nuclear ships, at least at that time, to get more power, you got more power but you had lower steam pressure. So you had to modify somethings so that you could make catapults work the way they were originally designed. So that was an interesting thing.

Then as soon as I finished my time in the Navy then I took one day off and went to work for Hercules Powder. They were doing the rocket design for submarine missiles and they were doing a lot of things there. I was then a rocket designer.

Mr. Nichols: Were you still in the Navy at the time?

Captain Kleiss: No, I took one day off and went to work for Hercules.

Mr. Nichols: So when did you retire?

Captain Kleiss: I retired in 1962.

Mr. Nichols: How long had you been a captain when you retired? Did you advance fairly rapidly?

Captain Kleiss: With our group. We had lost so many in the aircraft group, that advancement went mighty fast. But not as fast as the Marines. There were some interesting experiences there.

One of the instructors in dive-bombing had this one classmate of mine and a good friend. He had this one Marine and the Marine was not the super best pilot. But he passed. They got him in the Pacific, and guess what - here was the instructor now was under the command of this Marine. The Marines with all their losses this fellow went to the top.

Mr. Nichols: Was your flying career basically over once you returned to the states and got your aeronautical degree?

Captain Kleiss: Yes. They put it down on the basis that after a certain age and a certain hours, then you weren't in the top category. But I did have an interesting experience there at Lockheed as a aeronautics representative.

I had Factory A and Colonel Greenbank had Factory B. And Lockheed had 23,000 employees. So Kelly Johnson was there, the fellow that designed the U-2 and all that. I was able to go to conferences when Kelly Johnson and all the other engineers were talking about their projects. Being in charge of engineering contracts.

Mr. Nichols: And Lockheed was in California?

Captain Kleiss: Yes, at Burbank, California. Kelly Johnson was a totally interesting person. He would be sitting at this giant oval conference table, talking to the engineers, telling them exactly what they were going to do. As they would come through with this thing, they were going to make this fuselage a little larger and they were going to do this and they were going to do that. Everything was great. Finally somebody said "Kelly you haven't said a word. What do you say?"

"What Word?" Then everybody would go like this and he says "But" and he would give an alternative and he was so right. They had totally overlooked the obvious. He was a gem. In other words, like there was the Constellation that the Navy had at the _____ River. Doing some modifications on it. The thing failed and went down and just broke into so many pieces that they brought it back in bushel baskets. Put into an hangar. Kelly Johnson came back, went around and looked at each piece and everything. Spent a couple of days there.

"That gear box there was the trouble." In other words, if they had put the flaps down, one flap would start going down and the other one wouldn't. So the pilot would try to get it up to zero and say well, I'll

try again. Well, again, that same flap would go down a little bit further and then it wouldn't come up. Pretty soon, you had this thing of one flap down and one flap not down.

Mr. Nichols: It would give it a tendency roll.

Captain Kleiss: Well it did roll beyond all control and went down. He was able to figure this thing out and he says "well what happens this gear box is here, you put the cargo here, and when you make a jolt on the landing, this thing hits the gear box and hits this gear right here and that is what happened on that plane."

And he checked another one and says "this is about ready to happen". So he was just

Mr. Nichols: I read about Kelly Johnson.

Captain Kleiss: I met some wonderful people in my life.

Mr. Nichols: I think you have had a lot of interesting experiences in your World War II experiences. I am sure they are pretty unforgettable. Are there any things you would like to forget about World War II?

Captain Kleiss: Well...

Mr. Nichols: Everything maybe. Some memorable experiences that you wouldn't trade for anything? Something you would like to get out of your mind?

Captain Kleiss: We had this Norm West that I was talking about that put the search light down when we came back from Pearl Harbor. We called him Big West. Then there was Little West which was a very good friend of mine.

One day we were walking down the flight deck talking to each other. All of the sudden there was this thing there just right next to me, not even a foot away, the elevator had gone down and here was Little West in mid air going down. Well that goes down about 30 feet and we knew he would break an ankle, he would probably be half-way dead in a minute. I guess they forgot to sound the horn that the elevator was going down. So I went down there to take a look and he was just walking away. No problem at all. The elevator goes down so fast, that when he caught up with it, it was like stepping on a feather bed. He hit just exactly the right spot.

Mr. Nichols: Almost like coming down on a parachute or maybe easier.

Captain Kleiss: But then about two weeks after that he was coming up to land on the aircraft carrier, and the engine was giving him some problems. And they waved him off and he got along side the carrier. The engine quit and he landed in the water just at the bow of the ship. Just ahead of us.

I was watching because I was only just a few feet away and the ship came closer. He got out of the plane but he was a little bit dazed. Probably hit his head on something. He was holding on to the plane and then the plane started sinking and he let go of it. But then the antenna caught his ankle and just pulled him right on down. He was really a good friend.

That was a sorrowful thing.

And I saw another one there. We had a new pilot just ahead of me and he didn't ever see the plane that was hitting him. This other pilot in the Japanese plane passed as close as those people over there...passed me by but I couldn't get a shot at him because if I shot I would hit this new pilot. He never saw what hit him. So that is what frequently happened. That was Earl _____.
They named a new squadron after him. His mother was quite helpful with the Navy.

I met some tremendous people.

The one thing that was totally different on the Enterprise. In those days there was just total harmony between the crew of the Enterprise and the aviators. In a lot of ships there was a little difference. For example, on the Vincennes there was a little complaints there because the aviators were getting 50% more base pay than the other ones.

Mr. Nichols: Special treatment.

Captain Kleiss: Yes. This just wasn't like the Enterprise. The paymaster there says that we don't pay the aviators more, we just pay them sooner. It about evened out.

Mr. Nichols: Didn't the Enterprise receive 21 battle stars?

Captain Kleiss: A whole bunch of them. More than any other aircraft carrier. The only one that made all the way through the Pacific from the start to the finish was the Enterprise. Then they went to the other coast and they modified it to bring people back from Europe.

Mr. Nichols: The magic carpet?

Captain Kleiss: The Magic Carpet, yes. The thing was that just before Pearl Harbor we were due to come back and have the boilers rebricked and all the other things done. While we were at sea, they were rebricking the boilers. It was a really a hot dangerous task, rolling and pitching and whatnot. They rebricked all these boilers so that we were able to get full speed out of the ship and get some 30 something knots. One time I looked and here they took all the _____ and everything and the ship made a wide turn and this torpedo that came from a submarine just missed the stern by feet. If they hadn't had that extra little speed and that extra little zing and turn, with everything perfect on the ship then it wouldn't happen.

Mr. Nichols: Was the Enterprise was Halsey's flag ship?

Captain Kleiss: Yes, he was always there. Admiral Kimmel didn't like aviation. He thought that they were just a total nuisance. He met us when we first arrived at Pearl Harbor. First he insisted that we get into our white uniforms, stand at formation and said "you are on Pearl Harbor and you are welcome to stay here, but don't ask me for communication, transportation or anything else." He clomped off.

His friend was Admiral Halsey and he turned everything over to him. That was a wonderful thing to do.

Mr. Nichols: I understand that Halsey might have talked a little rough, but he was a fair person.

Captain Kleiss: Oh, he was wonderful. One time I got into a new plane. They pulled it out of the overhead and they hadn't quite done all the work on it yet. The compass wasn't quite right and it read _____ 18 just like a _____ read _____ 18. So when we went out here were both of us going to the same location. All of the sudden this plane turned away and "well I guess he is going in a different direction and whatnot". There was a problem with the radio not working as well as other things. They just pulled it down and for some reason or other hadn't gotten it all fixed.

Also I went out on the flight and came back to where the ship was to be and there was just solid. I went down to see the waves, like 50 feet. Nothing around. So I said that I need to get on top.

One other time I came back to the area and I could see the ship across a bunch of fog. I circled the ship.

But anyway this time I kept going up, and I had to go up to 20,000 feet to get up on top of the clouds. That was circling. So when I got to 20,000, I said that I would just have to go five miles this way and five miles that way each time got a bigger a square till finally it was 40 miles on side. So I decided that I would have to go back this thing and go across the diagonal and then I will get as close as I can to land. So I came out right over the center of the circle. There was the aircraft carrier right in the center of it. This little dot. And I started down from 20,000 feet, straight down. I made it back to the aircraft carrier.

Admiral Halsey said "well we sent out an MO for you". But my radio wasn't working.

He would stand at the gang plank watching all the people coming in. If an aviator was coming in for some reason or other, And he didn't like the uniforms they came out with, the ones that were partially blue, partially grey. He would say "go back and get in proper uniform, this is a working ship." In other words, he would rather you come without a coat. In fact I don't know if he would allow you to come with a coat unless it was for some ceremony or some other occasion. He was a wonderful, wonderful admiral.

So was Nimitz, Admiral Nimitz.

Mr. Nichols: That is what I understand. He had barbecues on Pearl for all the Texans. He really treated the guys right.

Captain Kleiss: My whole lifetime, I met wonderful on top of wonderful people. And very few of the other kind. Strangely enough, these people that were the other kind they did it to themselves. Nobody did anything to them. They just did it to themselves.

Mr. Nichols: Well I think we covered a lot of territory here today. Are you going to the reception tonight? Or are you just stuck here at the motel? You are going to the Symposium tomorrow?

Captain Kleiss: Yes, I will go to the Symposium tomorrow.

Mr. Nichols: Did you and your wife have children?

Captain Kleiss: Yes, we have five children.

Mr. Nichols: Any Navy people in the group?

Captain Kleiss: Will number one wanted to get into aviation but his eyes weren't that good. He was in Viet Nam. He has a lot of experiences about that one. Number two was in the Navy. He was in mine-sweeper and a few other things but after Viet Nam, he left and he is in the gear business now. He makes a very accurate gears, some of them for the military. He has his own private, the two brothers in the corporation.

The tape stopped at this point.

Transcribed by:
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Nimitz Volunteer
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