

**ADMIRAL NIMITZ NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF THE PACIFIC WAR
Fredericksburg, Texas**

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

**Tape provided by Malone Farrar
U.S. Navy–World War II–ACORN 8**

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Oral History of Malone Farrar: U.S. Navy ACORN 8

My name is Malone Farrar. I am an ADC, USN (Retired). My address is 9010 Hendon Lane, Houston, Texas 77036.

I enlisted in the Navy January 4th, 1940 at Houston, Texas. I went to boot camp in San Diego. After boot camp, I was transferred to VP-12, which was a PBV-3 Catalina Squadron right across the bay at NAS North Island. This was a peacetime Navy—only 70,000 men were the entire Navy, and apprenticed seamen made \$21 a month. In VP-12, I was in the beach crew removing wheels from the planes and attaching them so they could be handled on the ramps.

In June 1940, I was transferred to VP-13 Squadron waiting delivery of new PB2Y3s four engine Coronado flying boats from Convair just across the Bay. While we were waiting, I was sent to the firing range on San Clemente Island for two weeks of gunnery practice with a 1903 Springfield rifle and 45 caliber pistol. Later on, I was sent to machine gun school on the 30 caliber machine gun. I also was on a target repair party for the *USS Memphis* which was the flagship of Patrol Wing One. A tug pulled a large solid timber raft which had 12 x 16 targets hanging on masts, and the *Memphis* came up alongside and fired their 6 inch guns. After each firing run, we changed targets. The raft had only six inches of free board in calm water and so some times the waves could come over the raft three feet deep. You had to hang on or you would go overboard. We finally got our first PB2Y3 Coronado, and we were running tests on it when I got my orders for transfer. I had just been rated Aviation Machinist Mate Third Class.

My orders were for Aviation Advanced Base Able in Norfolk, Virginia. We were supposed to go to Londonderry, Ireland to set up a patrol plane base to help the British patrol for subs in the Atlantic. I was assigned TAD to VP-55, a PBM1 Mariner Squadron and sent to flight engineer's

school on the PBM. The school was located at Banana River, Florida. While we were about halfway through the school, the Japs hit Pearl . It was no longer a peacetime Navy.

At Banana River, we had five PBMs, each with two 50 caliber machine gun turrets and not a round of ammunition or any bombs or depth charges. The Base finally came up with six Springfield 30 caliber rifles and an old 30 caliber Lewis machine gun and 50 rounds of 30 caliber ammunition. They welded the mount to the machine gun on the bomb truck and put 44 rounds in it. The truck patrolled the beach and the highway that ran through the base. Six sentries carried the Springfield rifles with one round of ammunition each. We flew offshore patrols in the PBMs looking for subs. We only had beer cans to throw at them if we saw any. After about a week of sub patrol, we were transferred back to our original Advanced Base Able. I was rated Aviation Machinist Mate, Second Class at this time.

Back in Norfolk, we were formed into units—crews—building quick engine changes for PBYS. Then we were changed into a training unit for mechanic school students. We were training crews of eight men each to change engines on all kinds of aircraft: OS2U3s, F4F4s, PBYS and PBM aircraft. This was one of my first encounters with sabotage. My crew was sent to change engines in an F4F4, remove the oil coolers and flush all the oil lines. A new engine was delivered to me. Then some civilians walked in, accompanied by my chief in charge. And he asked me to open up the new engine. I got the top off of the engine crate. They told me to pull the oil pump out of the new engine. I removed the oil pump, and it was packed full of the whitest sand I ever saw. We sent the engine back to overhaul, and they sent me a new engine to install in the plane. I never heard another word about the incident.

After training two classes of mechanics, I asked to be transferred with the second class. We were all assigned to ACORN-8 which was an aviation construction operation and repair outfit and left Norfolk for San Francisco to Treasure Island. We arrived at Treasure Island in November of 1942. I was rated AMM-1 while I was on Treasure Island. All aviation ratings were then transferred to NAS Moffett Field, California, for combat training: obstacle courses, driving

school, aircraft 20 millimeter guns, 50 caliber guns, extended hikes of 25 miles or more. This went on for about two months. Then we were transferred to Terminal Island Air Station at Long Beach preparing all kinds of planes from the factory to be flown to bases across the country: SNJs, SNBs, PV-1s, PBJs, and some TIMM Trainer planes. Then we went to San Diego Naval Air Station to sign to advanced carrier training group—all kinds of carrier planes: F4U, F6F, F4F, SB2C, and TBMs.

We finally ended up in Port Hueneme, California, joining with the 73rd CB Battalion to make up the unit. Our skipper was Commander M. P. Evanson. He talked to us and told us what our destination would be when we embarked from the U.S. We went over all the equipment that was assigned to our unit and got it ready to load. On May 12th, 1943, we finally got it loaded and departed on the *USS President Polk*, a President Line's liner for Noumea, New Caledonia. We had about four 20 mm mounts on the deck of the ship, and somebody on the ship built a five or six foot kite and flew it out about 600 or 800 feet from the ship. The ship called an anti-aircraft drill and fired at the kite. The first shot hit the kite dead center, and it collapsed into the ocean. That was the end of anti-aircraft drills. After 17 days, we arrived at Noumea and began unloading our cargo at Magenta Bay which was about five miles from Noumea. We set up camp and waited for orders. I passed the test and was rated Aviation Chief Machinist Mate at this time—a slick armed chief.

One night in the last week in June 1943, we were at the movies when about 12 of us with Aviation ratings were pulled out of the movie and told to be ready, bag and baggage, to leave at 6:00 the next morning. We were all loaded in a motor launch and taken to an old WWI destroyer, the *USS Ballard*, and loaded aboard. We and another WWI destroyer escorted two Liberty ships to Espiritu Santo in the Hebrides Islands. We made it OK and got behind the sub nets and spent the night.

The next morning, we started at dawn for Guadalcanal. Early the following morning, we were all loaded on the two Higgins boats that the *Ballard* had aboard. We steamed up close to Lunga

Beach on Guadalcanal, and the ship unloaded the Higgins boats and left at 25 knots. We were taken to the beach and dumped out. The boat went back out and waited to be picked up. The *Ballard* came back, slowed enough to pick up the boats and headed to Tulagi Island. They had an anchorage that was behind sub nets. Just two weeks before this happened, the Japs had raided Guadalcanal with 126 airplanes. A marine finally picked us up off the beach, and on the way to Henderson Field, we were behind a four by four that was loaded with walking wounded from the New Georgia battle. Then we knew that we were in the combat zone. That night, Washing Machine Charlie bombed us. None of the bombs came close to us.

We were assigned to VF21—an F4F4 fighter squadron that was based at fighter strip number one—a short strip paved with Marston Matting steel planks. They had two mechanics to care for 24 airplanes so they needed help. We worked on the planes at night and tried to sleep in the daytime. We stayed with the squadron until they were rotated back for rest and recreation. They shot down 67 Jap planes in the six weeks they were in combat. Three pilots were lost, but one was later recovered. He had spent 21 days in a one man life raft before being rescued. The rest of our ACORN outfit had moved up to Guadalcanal and set up camp on the Kokumbona Beach.

We returned to the unit just in time to be moved on up the Slot to Munda, an airfield we had captured from the Japanese which was on New Georgia Island. We left Guadalcanal late in the evening of August 8th on an LCI—no lights and with other LCI and LST and destroyers and arrived at a small island about three miles from Munda and stayed on the island all day until late on August 9th. Then in small LCTs, we were taken to the airstrip. The strip was full of bombs and shell holes with dead Japs in a lot of them. We set up camp in a small valley about a half mile from the strip. We ate C&D rations for the first month while we were there. The first night was very long, scary and nerve wracking. Each tent had to have a guard all night long, and after it got dark, no one could get outside the tent and all lights were out.

The next day, we started getting our gear set up to start operating an air strip. Japs built the

strip in a large coconut grove called Lambeti, Plantation. They used slave labor to dig coral and carried it in baskets and spread it out under the palm trees. They spread it out about two foot thick and rolled it out with a steam roller that they had brought from Singapore. The soil the trees grew in was only about two or three feet thick, and when they laid it on the surface of the soil overnight they cut down the palm trees and filled the holes with coral, and they had an airstrip. When the CBs started building our strip, they had to scrape the top soil off and get down to the bed coral so that it would support our heavier aircraft.

The Japs had built many bunkers around the field. Everyone had two entrances so that they could get out if a grenade was thrown in. We started building a tower and getting the radio and generators running. The CBs were working like mad to get the strip in operation. On August 11th, we had the first air raid. On August 13th, the Japs had dug a cave on the side of the hill that the tower was built on. It was E shaped with three openings. The soldiers had bypassed the cave during the fighting, but had to clean it out before dark. Hand grenades were thrown out, dynamite was thrown out, so they had an interpreter tell them they were to burn them out but they wouldn't budge. So they were burned out—30 men and two female nurses.

A fighter control was set up in the cave, and one night we were caught when the Japs came in bombing. A 1000 pound bomb hit on the hill, but we were OK. The first plane landed on August 14th. On August 16th, the Japs moved in a small artillery gun on the peninsula about a mile and a half across the border from the airstrip and started shelling our camp and anything else that moved. The next morning, about six SBD dive bombers took care of the gun. The CBs were extending and widening the airstrip. It was about 150 feet wide and 2500 feet long when we took it from them. When we left it in May of 1944, it was 350 feet wide and 8200 feet long.

On September 3rd, 1943, one of the TBF squadrons was trying to add more bomb racks to the bomb bay on one of the planes. They loaded it up and took off, but they thought they had a fire in the bomb bay so they supposedly dropped all their bombs and returned to the field. The bombs had instantaneous fuses and either one or two bombs fell from the bomb bay when they

were opened. The explosion killed about 26 men and destroyed several aircraft. All types of aircraft were operating off the field---bombers, fighters, patrol planes and transports. We had two other planes crash and explode on the airstrip. A PV-1 blew a tire on takeoff and crushed a drop tank under the wing and burned until a load of depth charges exploded. Another time, a B-25 lost an engine on takeoff and ran off the end of the runway and burned until its bombs exploded. No one was hurt in these crashes.

On the night of September 13th, the Japs dropped a 1000 pound bomb on the airstrip. There were 18 truckloads of coral to fill it, but the CBs had it back in service in about two hours. The night of September 14th, the Japs started at sunset and bombed us all night long--17 separate air raids, but very little damage was done. On September 28th, one lone Betty bomber sneaked in and dropped a string of bombs down through our camp. No one was injured, because we all had well built fox holes.

In the meantime, our forces had invaded Bougainville and Vela Lavella Islands and built airstrips so the war was moving farther north. The perimeter around the beachhead on Bougainville was held by the Marines, and early one morning, the Japs opened fire on the airstrip. They had moved all artillery on the island around the perimeter. All planes had to evacuate and many of them came to our strip. I think we had about 200 aircraft on our field that night. It would have been a chance for the Japs to really hurt us, but they did not.

We were running bombers off our field so we were relieved by another ACORN outfit, and we were transferred to Banika in the Russell Islands to pick up new equipment and go back into the war. We were about two months getting new equipment; getting it loaded, and started for New Guinea. We were underway for about a month and finally got to our destination which was Biak in the Schouten Islands. The airstrip was on a small island off Biak called Owi. We had a parallel bomb strip for heavy bombers. The Air Force had 48 B-24s operating off of this air strip. The Japs didn't bomb us, but about three times. The Air Force ran two bombing missions from Owi to bomb Balikpapan, Borneo oil refineries. They each carried H-1000 lb bombs and two

400 gallon gas tanks in the bomb bay. They took off at 2:00 in the morning and didn't return until about 6pm the following evening—about a 16 hour mission. They did this twice, and I don't think they lost a plane.

The Marines invaded the Palau Islands which were about 700 miles north of Biak, and when they got the airfield operational, two squadrons of F4Us and SBDs stopped at our field on the way to Peleliu. We had a problem with the starter on one of the F4Us, but we had some bungee starters so we got them started. The Marines came back about two days later, and we gave them some more of the bungee starters, and they took all of our small arms. The Japs were coming into the camp at night and killing them so we gave them all of our small arms. They wanted some more of the bungee starters. They were bombing in the landing circle and when a starter went out, they used a bungee starter and changed the shot gun starter that night.

Just about two weeks later, I received my orders to go to Stateside. I flew from Owi to Manus in the Admiralty Islands to wait for transportation to the States. After two weeks, I was assigned to the George Clymer—an APA for transportation. We were supposed to get underway at 9:00 the following morning. At about 8:00, an ammo ship with 4000 tons of TNT blew up about a half a mile away. All hands were killed, and it was the *USS Mount Hood*. We left Manus, stopped at Majuro Atoll on into Pearl Harbor. Stopped at Pearl for two days and then back into the States and we reported in at Alameda Naval Air Station, San Francisco, and I finally got a Chief Petty Officer's uniform. Up until then, I only had a baseball cap with a fouled anchor on it. And that was my uniform and khakis.

So then, from there, I was assigned to Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi. I was put in flight test there. I had the SB2Cs coming out of overhaul, and we would prepare them for flight tests and get them ready to be returned to the fleet. I was there about up until August when the Atomic Bomb was dropped, and I happened to be on a one week leave in Houston when the war was over, and that was a happy, happy day. And that was the end of my wartime career in the U.S. Navy.