

INTERVIEW  
of  
Col. R. Bruce Porter

**MR. COX:** This is William G. Cox. Today is Saturday, September the 30<sup>th</sup>, year 2,000. I am interviewing Col. R. Bruce Porter. This interview is taking place at the National Museum of the Pacific War at the auditorium of the Fredericksburg High School in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War studies archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Good morning, Col. Bruce. How are you today?

**COL. PORTER:** Well, I am fine, Bill.

**MR. COX:** I am looking forward to this interview. I've read your biography, and it appears to have a lot of very interesting information in it.

**COL. PORTER:** Well, I think I have had an interesting career of Marine Corps and various parts of it. As we proceed through our interview I'll tell you of all my activities. One of the interesting parts of my aviation career with the Marines was, I think, the unusual part in that I was both a day fighter and then helped form the night fighters in night fighting when I came back from Guadalcanal after my combat there. As it turned out, I'm the only Marine that has victories in the Corsair (fighter) and then two victories the same night in the F6F (Hellcat) which included a boca bomb which was on one of the planes that I shot down which was a Betty. So, in a nutshell, I'm a little different, my record is a little different from any of the other Marine day fighter aces.

**MR. COX:** Okay, if I might interrupt you there just a bit, I think that gives us a good solid background as to what we're going to cover and how interesting it is gonna be. Now let's see if we can document just a little bit of your background. Where were you born?

**COL. PORTER:** I was born in Salina, Utah, August 18, 1920.

**MR. COX:** Okay. About what part of Utah is Salina located?

**COL. PORTER:** Well, it's near Colorado Springs, you come down through Colorado Springs and into the valley and it's located on that part of Utah.

**MR. COX:** So it'd be close to the Eastern border of Utah and Western border of Colorado.

**COL. PORTER:** That'd be correct.

**MR. COX:** Beautiful country.

**COL. PORTER:** I hadn't been back there but one time. When I came back from coming back from the East Coast to the West Coast I came through Salina and I stopped there for just to see what it looked like.

**MR. COX:** You went into service when, and did you enlist or how did that come about?

**COL. PORTER:** Well, I'll tell you what, we had a sort of an interesting story about my enlistment. When I was a student at University of Southern California, and I was on a swimming scholarship down there. I did quite a lot of swimming and was more or less a beach boy in Southern California. At any rate, I was at the fraternity one day and they had various guests come in, you know, every so often and we had two Navy ensigns come and give us a little chat on how the war clouds were looming and nothing had happened. This was in, let's see, that would be late in 1941 or early in 1940. This would be 1940. And another fellow and I listened to their program and they had a deal where they were accepting applications for Pensacola for two years of college if you passed all the requirements. We had to go through elimination base down in Long Beach, California. Both he and I passed all the academic parts of it, you know, grades and things like that. So we went down to Long Beach, the Navy Reserve Center, and there was a 30-day elimination base there in those days. We were Privates and then Private First Class. We went through our training there, and you either made it or didn't make it. It was thirty days and you got a solo. If you soloed during this period of time, they approved you, and they sent you home.

**MR. COX:** So it was some actual flying time experience?

**COL. PORTER:** Actual experience. We had a period of time with the N-3 and the Yellow Peril. So both of us passed this aviation part. We were made Aviation Cadets, Marine Aviation Cadets. That was still that stage of the game, so we went home waited our orders. I didn't go back to college because I didn't know when I was going to be called to duty. In the meantime an interesting thing happened, Bill, because I contacted a friend of mine that was down in Corpus Christi, Texas, going through training. I said, "What's your suggestion on me learning something because I've all this college stuff, you know," and he said, "One thing, Bruce, be sure and get that Morse Code." "Morse Code!", I said, "What the hell would I need that for?" He says, "That's gonna be real important when you get in ground school." So this fellow and I went to night school at this junior college down in Los Angeles and took the Morse Code. It was the greatest salvation I had because we ended up we had to take about 15 or 20 words a minute. You know, dit, dot, dot, dit, dot, dot and some fellows washed out on that Morse Code.

**MR. COX:** I couldn't do it.

**COL. PORTER:** Okay. Well, then we went home and waited orders and I got orders, the other fellow did, too. We went down to Pensacola in January or February of 1941 and reported in there. We were just a couple of college guys, you know, that didn't know too much but running around on the beaches and having a lot of fun, and we were away from home. It was cold and windy down there in Pensacola when we got off the gray bus and walked on and reported to the sentry. No wonder these guys gave us a hard time, you know. We were just in, so, do you wanna know a little bit about my training down there?

**MR. COX:** Yes, I would.

**COL. PORTER:** Well, we reported in there and then basically there were three squadrons, Squadron 1, Squadron 2, and Squadron 3, and they were set up where the squadrons were situated all over the vast area of Pensacola at small fields. There was Sopley Field, and there was other various air fields named after navy people. We'd go to ground school, generally in the afternoon, and we'd go out early in the morning to fly. We had what we called "cattle buses", great big buses that were pulled by a

truck or trailer type of thing so that you could put a lot of people on 'em out to these airfields because they were generally 30 miles away or 15 miles away from the center part of Pensacola. Then we'd go through our flying activities. First Squadron was basic training, like the N3N and all that. If you got through this part of the training and they would give you an up, and then you went into the Second Squadron. You did a little bit of different training in that, like acrobatics and things like, and I had a helluva hard time because I got ill when I was doing that. I'd throw up, and I was just at the point of tossing in the towel, because I'd get so damn sick. You couldn't believe it, you know. Well, you do loops with an instructor, you see, and my head would be over the side of the plane like, you know, a chicken. That last time, I got out of there and the instructor "Porter," he says, "I don't know if you'll ever make it. You better report to sick bay and see if they can give you anything." Well, I went in there and they said there's not a damn thing they can do for you. You just gotta try it a little longer and see if it improves. Well, one day, Bill, I did it. This one day of acrobatics it suddenly went away. I was about ready to quit, and it went away, and I just never got air sick again. So, anyway, I got through Squadron 2 and then we went into Squadron 3, which is basically a lot of instrument training and navigation and things of that nature, like heavier airplanes formation, and we got through that. When you got through your third basic part of your squadron training you were pretty much assured that you'd get through the training period. I even went and bought a car. I bought a 1941 red convertible Ford, so I had a lot of friends that I didn't know. Why I was only making seventy-five dollars a month.

**MR. COX:** Girls or boys for friends?

**COL. PORTER:** Well, both, mostly the guys on the base. They didn't have any ---- rides, and , hell, you make seventy-five dollars a month, and those guys would screw the hell out of you in interest and all that.

**MR. COX:** Based on that description, how would you describe the living conditions there during the training?

**COL. PORTER:** The living conditions were not bad. We had barracks that are still there, in fact, I have been down to Pensacola a number of times afterwards. We had chicken, chicken, chicken, chicken, and more chicken. The food wasn't bad, but, of course, you know, we'd have ground school and then we'd have to march, march, march, march, and march some more, you know. Every morning we got up right outside the quarters there, reveille was probably at five o'clock in the morning and boy with the old bugle going off you'd get out of your bed, you know, and get out and be cold. We would be in shorts and that wind came on off that damn Pensacola Bay like you can't believe and we'd do all the calisthenics for fifteen, twenty minutes or half hour. Then we'd go back and get in our gear and that's when we'd get ready and have a little breakfast if you could eat anything, get in the cattle bus and head off to whatever field you're at. We had Sundays off, but we worked on Saturdays as everything was speeded up, you see. We went through training in six or seven months what they were doing for a year and a half before because war was coming on but it hadn't happened yet. So everything was accelerated, you see. We could go into Pensacola for the evening, you know, doing something. I would say that mainly our pattern was to go in there and let our hair down. While we were at Pensacola they took so many people out of each class for what was called "a guinea pig test". This test became the basic foundation for the astronauts, for the Canadian Air people, the Air Force, and all these people. During the test we had three days of very intensified training, or physical examinations. They'd put things on our head, you know, and they'd twirl us

around and they'd put us in space feeling that space and stuff like that. Later on that test became the official test for Canada and for ourselves. In fact, I was called back down to Pensacola by the doctor and they gave us the same test again. It became a fundamental test for all aviators, and we called it the "the guinea pig" test. Joe Foss was one of the guinea pigs, and at any rate that test was sorta an unusual thing. It was nothing special, they just picked a random number, so many in each class, but what happened is that test became so important all of Germany's tests, similar tests, were destroyed during the war. So this was fundamentally the finest test that they had had in the world, and they've used it all over the world. This captain, a flight surgeon, said that he was back for a big conference in Sweden or something like that and all these doctors said here's your test, here we're using this for all of the basic things we do. So that was an interesting medical part while I was down in Pensacola. Well, after we got out of Squadron 3, all of us in the Marine Corps become fighter pilots or dive bomber pilots while in the Navy they went into the PBY's, some became fighter pilots and some guys went aboard cruisers flying OS2U's and things like that didn't go down to Ocklawaha, but all the Marine Corps went to Ocklawaha. That's where we went after we finished Squadron 3, and we became Aviation Cadets down there, Marine Aviation Cadets. Incidentally, we were the last of the Marine Corps Aviation Cadets because they stopped this program shortly after I got commissioned in July of 1941. They took a percentage of each class of Navy Cadets, and made them Marines. I think they said the top ten percent they made Marines and that was the way they selected the Marine Corps pilots. But we were all Marine Cadets at that particular time and so I got commissioned down in Ocklawaha, Florida. We went through, you might call that a Squadron 4, but it was just advanced training. We flew the fleet airplanes like the F3S, and the F2S, and the SPC's and things like that, all that type of airplane. Then we got commissioned, and I was commissioned and I had a thirty-day leave. I went back to California and in my red convertible Ford, with my top down. I drove from Miami to Los Angeles in three and one half days which is quite a feat, you know, in those days. I'd get up early in the morning and drive all until I couldn't keep my eyelids open and find a motel and go to bed and get up and do the same thing the next day.

**MR. COX:** Quite a long trip in three and one half days.

**COL. PORTER:** At any rate, after leave in California I was assigned at Quantico, Virginia, to a new squadron, a brand new squadron BMF-121, which was to become the number one squadron in the Marine Corps as far as Japanese victories were concerned. Joe Foss was in it. I reported to Quantico and there was no squadron there. They gave me all my gear, piles of stuff, you know, all your helmets, and goggles, and winter gear and all that kinda crap. They said, "Porter, your squadron is down in New Bern, North Carolina." I said, "Where the hell is that?" Then I said "Well, they got it on the map." So I spent a couple of days there figuring out where I was going. So I went down to New Bern, North Carolina. That's where Cherry Point is now. It was nothing but hay fields and wide open spaces, building was going on like mad, building things. So we went there and there was two squadrons, 111 and 121, there. I reported to Major Sam Jacks, who later became a very famous person in the Marine Corps from the early days. So we went and I met all the squadron and we went through maneuvers and things with the F4F, the Wildcat, the F4F3. That was a one helluva an airplane. Now you know this program that they had there had a very much more detailed training than we had before. So, at any rate, the war clouds were looming and all that type of thing. We never got to Pearl Harbor. I didn't know where the hell it was, you know, a lot of the Navy guys didn't know where it was either.

**MR. COX:** May I interrupt you there?

**COL. PORTER:** Yes.

**MR. COX:** After you were in Cherry Point, North Carolina, then you were transported overseas?

**COL. PORTER:** No, well, what happened there was we, Squadron 121, were on maneuvers. The North-South maneuvers, a quite famous part of the whole war because we learned a lot of stuff.

**MR. COX:** Was this carried out in North Carolina, Louisiana and...

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, all over. We were part of that thing and, you understand, the name Cherry Point wasn't even in existence at that time. It was New Bern, North Carolina, the air base there. It was just a dirt stretch, we're living in tents and all that type of thing. So we got back from maneuvers, and we were in a movie theater, we had some dates. We went out with girls, you know.

**MR. COX:** Oh! Red convertible again!

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, red convertible! I had a couple of real nice Southern belles back there, boy, they were beautiful. On buddy got married to one of 'em. Any rate, we were in a movie theater and all of a sudden the lights went on, and they said "Pearl Harbor has been bombed, war's declared" so that was December 7<sup>th</sup>. "All military people report back to the base." Boy we high tailed it back to the airfield, and the skipper was there and he said, "Report back here at eight o'clock in the morning we're heading for Quantico and the West Coast." I had rented a place out on the bay with another fellow, Bob Frazier, who later became CO of VMF112, a very famous squadron, too.

**MR. COX:** So you had off-base quarters at that time?

**COL. PORTER:** Yes, I did. We were able to either stay in the tent or rent something. I was a big shot I was making about \$120.00 a month.

**MR. COX:** So that was good living!

**COL. PORTER:** That was good living there, down off the base it was. But it wasn't too bad, you know, to live in a tent as the weather wasn't too bad. But any rate, we took my red convertible to the apartment. I stayed down below and Bob went up to the top and opened up the window and threw out all of our clothes and I got 'em down there and put 'em in the back, and then he came down and we didn't even pay the rent, we had clothes in the dry cleaners and everything else, but we took off.

**MR. COX:** Do you suppose they're still looking for you back there?

**COL. PORTER:** Probably some landlady is saying, where in the hell is that Porter and Frazier. Frazier was killed later on. But we took off and as we got back there to the base, the planes were taking off and the mechanic was warming up my plane. He said, "Lt." he says, "You're off to Quantico." I just had a bag. I said "Here's the keys to my car. Get it to Quantico, or wherever the hell I can get it to." And there's my clothes in the back, and I threw a few other things in the bottom of the F4F, we took off and we caught the flight of planes and we went on up to Quantico.

**MR. COX:** So this would be on December the 8<sup>th</sup>?

**COL. PORTER:** December the 8<sup>th</sup> exactly, Bill. We got in Quantico and then they immediately began working 24 hours a day. They're working on airplanes, putting armor plate in it, and machine guns, 50 calibers, and as soon as they were armed and ready, we were to take off for to defend the West Coast.

**MR. COX:** Were these new planes that you had never flown before?

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, they were new. Wildcats were the brand new airplanes for the Navy and the Marine Corps.

**MR. COX:** But you had flown Wildcats previous to that?

**COL. PORTER:** Well, just when I reported into 121.

**MR. COX:** Had you done any work with the machine guns or armament?

**COL. PORTER:** Well, we had a lot of gunnery practice in training down in Ocklawaha. We had quite a lot of pilot training going for sleeves. They'd have a plane takeoff and they'd call it on the sleeve and we'd go up and we'd shoot at overhead passes and underhead, a lot of things like that. But we were scheduled to go to North Island, and so we had all of our gear and we had Chesty Puller, old General Puller. He was a Major and he gave us our sendoff. He said "Boys, go out there and give 'em hell!", he says. Have you been to Quantico?

**MR. COX:** No, sir, I haven't.

**COL. PORTER:** Well, Quantico is a big oval, like a pie or a circle, and you take off over to the Potomac and the hangars are on one side, and the Potomac River is on the other as you take off. Well, the F4F, the Wildcat, was a helluva of a hard plane to take off and land. It had olleos that go up and down and you'd had the brakes weren't the greatest. At any rate, it grounded real good. Also we had problems with the tachometer and with our pitch of the prop. It wouldn't go into low pitch sometimes. And so as I was taking off, I noticed my pitch wasn't going in. I knew I wasn't gonna make it. I wouldn't get airborne. I was looking down and trying to decide what the hell to do, to get wet or brake it and so I started braking it and the plane got away from me. The first thing, you know, Bill, I was headed for all these airplanes that were lined up. They were SB2C's (Dive Bombers) of another squadron. I was headed right at 'em! Here I was, you know, a little 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. just out of flight school and all that kind of thing. So the first thing I knew, I had lined up right between the columns of planes, the tails were here and the props were here. I went right through like a picket fence and then all of a sudden, in front of me I saw a training plane. It was an SNJ which we used for instrument work and such. Right in front of me! I thought, uh, oh, this is it. The guy saw me coming, and I guess he said to pull the chocks, and so that plane went right by and the next thing I ran into was a telephone pole by a ditch, and I went into the ditch and came up like that (using hand motions), see. I hit my head on something and I had blood coming down my face, but I was stopped, you know, my tail up. All of a sudden I saw a brown car coming up with the Colonel in it, and I said to myself, "Oh, am I gonna get my ass chewed off, probably get court-martialed, put me in jail the rest of my life," you know. He climbs up on the wing, "Are up all right, Lt." I said, "Yes sir, yes sir, Colonel." He pulls out a white handkerchief and said, "Here, wipe your blood off," you know, "and come out with me",

and so he helps me out of the airplane, I left my chute in there, you know, all that. We get into the squad car and he says, "Don't worry about a thing, son, we'll have that airplane ready and you can catch the squadron in 24 hours." So I got out of there and went to back to the base, got myself all squared away. They did, they had that plane fixed in two days. Now, I'm by myself, Bill. I haven't navigated across the country at all, and I was by myself. There was nobody to follow, and the skipper was gone, the squadron was gone. I got maps out and all that kind of stuff, to figure out how the hell I was gonna go, you know. So, at any rate, I got all my stuff out and headed out and navigated and caught the squadron in Dallas, Texas at the Eagle Mountain base. I guess it was in those days, that was 1941, right after Pearl Harbor. Sure enough, they were there, I had caught up with them. They'd been fogged in. You know, Dallas has a lot of fog, so I was fogged in there, they were fogged in, and so we were all happy. The skipper said, "Hi Bruce," you know, "How are you, Lieutenant?" I said, "I'm fine, sir. I made it." And he says, "What's that cut on your head?" I said, "Well, I just banged the instrument panel". He said, "Okay". They took care of us in Texas. Those Texans, you know, are wonderful people. They had us up to a penthouse there and they're patten us on the back, giving us a great time. We were there for a couple of days and when the fog lifted, we headed to North Island. Now, understand, there were no Marine fighters on the West Coast. There was a few Army units there defending the West Coast. There was 111 and 121, and the other sister squadron that was down in Newbern with us in F4F's. We were there just a few days and then they took us out to Camp Kearney, which is now Miramar, and which is 2200 feet of dirt strip. They had a tower and all that, and we had tents. Well, we went out there and quartered there and every morning we're up at 4:00 o'clock. They had six or eight of us turn up our airplanes. We had cartridge-starters on those, and you'd put a cartridge in and start your engine so they'd warm up the plane so we'd be able to take off. We would warm up the plane for a pre-down take-off, if anything happened, and they had a couple of alerts. See, we didn't have radar as it wasn't perfected at that time, and so we would sit in the airplanes waiting to take off. I had a girl friend, a lady friend, that was going to USC with me and she was really a pretty little gal. I got tangled up with her a little bit, and we got married. We weren't supposed to, but we did. Let's see that was January. In January we were doing maneuvers and stuff, and while we were doing all those things, we were defending the West Coast, really. They had some other planes down the coast but not many. They pulled me and about six other guys out of the squadron and put us in 111, and we were shipping out for overseas. We left in February, I don't know what the dates were, but I've got them in my book. We didn't know where to as they were sealed orders. So we had all of our planes boxed up and put on board the USS GARFIELD, and we headed out and we went to Samoa, American Samoa. And so we went there to Samoa, and they assembled the airplanes. The only way they could get the airplanes from off the ship was the wings were taken off and they put 'em on the back bed of a trailer truck and they would haul 'em out to the air base. Now the air base hadn't been finished. You see, there were no seabees at that time, so they had civilian construction outfits working on it. Then they had the seabees, they had just formed the seabees. They came in and they started making the runway. So we were operating off of a dirt strip right out in the ocean about 22-2300 feet out of coral and everything and living in tents.

**MR. COX:** You were at what location at that time?

**COL. PORTER:** American Samoa. I want to be sure you understand that there is an American Samoa and there is British Samoa. Now Pango Pango was American Samoa, and British Samoa was run by the, well, actually, it was a German mandate. There were a lot of German off springs, you know. But it was run by New Zealand and they were building an airfield over there in Western Samoa, Apia, that's the capitol there. At any rate, we went through all kinds of training there. It was

very intensified training. We didn't know whether Japan was going to invade us any day, you know, any minute. They had a submarine come in there and shell, so we were on final alert all the time. We'd have four of us get up at four o'clock in the morning, turn our airplanes out and sit out on the runway ready to see if anybody came in, you know. We had radar then. We had a little bit of radar so we were doing a lot of maneuvers and we were dog fighting in gunnery. This turned out to be a big benefit for me because I was able to, in fact all of us, were able to be pretty crack shots on sleeve work with learning formation work and a lot of dog fighting. We did all that type of thing and then we went over to Western Samoa and we had part of the squadron over there and that was where they were staging for Guadalcanal. We didn't know at that time where they were heading but it was known where they were going to go like Mitch Page. I ran into him quite a bit. My friend, Mitch Page, was over in Western Samoa. They did maneuvers and all that stuff and then they did 'em there, that's where the Carson Raiders trained. They went over the top of the mountains there and on the other side. I asked Mitch, "What are you guys doing?" Well, we just went across the mountains, you know.

**MR. COX:** These are land Marines?

**COL. PORTER:** Land Marines. Of course, you see they're out there, too, they were training just like we were. At any rate, we went to full alert as we figured the fleet was coming in, you know. This was before Midway, mind you. So they (the Japanese) had everything going their way. They had all their carriers and they were so superior to us it wasn't even funny. We had one alert and that was when we went up to Fuddi, a little island up where they staged for Tarawa and that area. This was way before Tarawa happened. We flew up there, six of us, and then they had six SBD's. We were sent up there to ward off the Japanese fleet, and we would have been like a fly swatter. They would have wiped us out in a couple of seconds. We went up there and spent a period of time and then we came back. The squadron came back with our little outfit, six or eight planes and then the 121, my old outfit, which I was pulled out of, came through on the USS LURLEY and they stopped in the harbor there in Apia. They were on the way to Guadalcanal, so rather than take us who were well trained they had selected this boot outfit. I talked to Joe Foss, I said, "Hell, you guys, those guys will have 4, 5, 10 hours (combat training) for you and we have 500 or 600." We were crack shots and everything else. They didn't know that the general there, Gen. Price, had said "nobody in my command leaves here." We were defending Samoa or whatever they called it. So we stayed and they went on down and Joe made his terrific record and they did a fantastic job for 2<sup>nd</sup>Lts. I know a lot of those guys as we went down shortly afterwards and relieved them. So we spent about nine months there in Samoa and we were really well trained when we got orders. They needed some replacements so another squadron and the squadron which I was in flew us on a DC-3 from the Fiji's down to New Caledonia and New Hebrides to Turtle Bay. That's where all the fighter pilots and the SBD pilots were stationed, and so we went down there and got our orders and all that type of thing. That was January, February, 1943. Guadalcanal was still going on pretty hot and heavy, so we're there flying the F4F's, Wildcats, as replacements up to Guadalcanal, and then we got the Corsair. We were about the second or third squadron that had Corsairs. VF124 was the very first one with Kenny Walsh or Bill Gates as the CO. We trained in the Corsairs and had a lot of casualties. So we went down to New Orleans and picked up these airplanes and got the Corsair, FCF4U1, that was a bird cage. Now you had terrible visibility in the birdcage versus a bubble canopy which was on the F4U2, and 3 and 4. The bubble had excellent visibility, but we had the little bird cage which you just closed over you and it was very difficult to see. You couldn't see over the nose, that Corsair has a long nose. This guy gives me a handbook and says, "Here you go, Captain. See



you later.” And he goes over and gives the handbook to one of the other guys and so we took off. And I’d never seen a Corsair! But, these other guys, you know, they checked out for hours in the States on these damned things and so we took off and we flew them to Buttons, which is the New Hebrides. We were stationed out there at Turtle Bay where the Marine Corps had a base. We’d come out of Guadalcanal to Turtle Bay and that’s where we had our quarters, etc. So we flew in there and then we reformed VF121. That was the one Joe Foss was in and he and his gang went back to the States. So we were there with VF121 and we had a new skipper, Ray Broom, who was line officer that got into flying. He hardly ever flew because he wasn’t a very good pilot, and he knew this, and so he let all of us captains run the squadrons. At any rate, we went up to Guadalcanal shortly after that, and Henderson Field was still operating. Fighter I and Fighter II are (Landing Figloc) were operating, too, but we went, for some reason or other, to Henderson Field for our tour there.

**MR. COX:** Now, had Guadalcanal been completely captured at that time?

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, it was pretty much captured when we got up there. It was secured, I think in February, January or February, I’m not sure of these dates. You’d have to check them out but there was still a lot of activity there. I mean they were coming down bombing at night. The slot where we went up hadn’t been taken. Munda was still in Japanese hands and that wasn’t too far from Guadalcanal. So they would fly down from Kahili and from that area and have strafing runs, etc. From Rabaul would be quite a ways away, but Kahili was not that far. Bougainville was about 400 miles from Guadalcanal and they’d come down for big strikes. The Japanese would come from Rabaul down to Kahili and restage and everything else. Rabaul was more or less like a back area for the Japanese where they’d reform after they’d got from Truk to Rabaul. So we got into Guadalcanal, and that’s where I had my first combat in the Corsair on intercept and I think it was June 30<sup>th</sup>. It might be written down there in my book on the dates. I’m a little hazy on these dates but we were at constantly on alert there at Guadalcanal for intercepts and so we were called for an intercept some time in June. A huge intercept! That was when the Admiral Yamamoto wanted to really send a lot of things down there and that was their last big thrust at Guadalcanal. They had some where around 70-80, maybe it was 120 Zeroes come down on a fighter sweep. They didn’t have any bombers or anything. Well, we intercepted that. That’s when I got my first kill and it was a situation there with, some fellow was interviewing me the other day about down at our American Fighter Ace reunion down in Reno, and they’re getting together with the Japanese and they’re correlating the kills like that day, how many we said we had and how many they said they had. You know, there’s a lot of and also putting together the like this guy sorta got into the fact that I might’ve shot one of their top Zero aces down and it could have been his ‘cause I described my, I’ll never forget it, was a silver Zero, it wasn’t camouflaged. And you could see probably 15 to 20 miles when we were at 20,000 feet. You could see planes coming, you know, and we were right in the middle of ‘em and before I knew it, I was dog fighting with this Zero, my wing man was covering me. We tried to stick together, covering one another, and I shot down this Zero and I damaged another. But I never had such a fight, you know. You read about it, think about it, and never see it when it happens. This Zero came at me and I came at him etc., and then he just pulled straight up. Now we’re at 20,000 feet, you know, and that’s something. That Zero just went straight up out of my sight when I was firing head on at him and I went right after him in this Corsair and he was surprised. They hadn’t really gotten into combat with us in Corsairs too much. None of these (Japanese) guys had encountered the Corsairs. But that Corsair had the power, you know, so I just pulled up right after I got him on the top of the loop and blew him up and went down to help my wing man and I got one off his tail. As I was explaining to somebody, it’s amazing those dog fights, there might be 70-80 airplanes in the air and all of a sudden

in two or three minutes there's nobody there. Everybody's all broken up. You see some spots down in the ocean from 20,000 feet where planes have gone down. We were operating out of Henderson Field, and at the same time they were building this airstrip on the Russell Islands which was about 60-70 miles towards Kahili up the slot. This was when we were starting to move up Guadalcanal and our movement towards Japan, you see.

**MR. COX:** Now, the slot, was that the area where the Japanese were coming on supply routes?

**COL. PORTER:** This was a supply route and we had some tremendous naval battles there. We lost a lot and they lost a lot.

**MR. COX:** Did you participate in some of those battles?

**COL. PORTER:** I never got into any of those battles because Joe Foss and that gang did because they (Japanese) were trying to reinforce Guadalcanal with troops. We were right after that because they (Japanese) were pretty much still trying to get the Japanese out of there. At night they'd come in in a destroyer on the far end of Guadalcanal and send rubber boats in and things like that and getting 'em out by destroyers and submarines. They were trying to get the Japanese out of there, you see, because they were evacuating Guadalcanal. But Russell Islands airstrip was being built, so we were the first outfit in there. There was VF 121 and, I think, it was 210 or 211 that went in there with us. We went into the Russell Islands, that's when we were starting to advance up the slot. That's when they (US) invaded Munda. I had a big engagement there in Munda, a couple of 'em and then we would go on up to Kahili, which was 400 miles or so. Kahili was where Yamamoto was shot down. He was coming from Rabaul which was quite a ways on up, the exact mileage, I think, is 5-600 miles on up, quite a ways from Bougainville. So we went up and we went on strikes up to Kahili. One thing that people talk about is fear and things like that. I think most all of us thought about it. I was just talking to Jeff LeBlanc about it and I said were you the same way I was, Jeff, that you're scared of being shot down or having engine failure and being captured by the Japanese because they were beheading the pilots and they were shooting us in the parachutes. I had a friend of mine that lost a part of his foot. Sam Logan was written up in "Life" magazine and everything. He was in the squadron back in Samoa with me. He had his right foot chopped off by a propeller. The Japanese had shot him down. As he was coming down, he opened his chute too high and a Jap plane chopped his foot off. Any rate, those fears were with you all the time. Hoping your engine ran okay and that you weren't shot down, you see. So we had that on our mind, naturally, when we were taking these long hops up the slot. Believe it or not, they had some B-24's there at Guadalcanal. We escorted them up over Kahili and I had quite an engagement up over there because we were right over Kahili, which is in Bougainville, and where they came up from. You could even see 'em taking off from the dust coming up.

**MR. COX:** These were Zeroes.

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, all Zeroes. So they had a bunch of 'em and they'd come up and intercept us. And funny thing, you know, they, some of those pilots, would stay out and they'd do loops and acrobatics out and some of em wouldn't, but it was a crazy thing this one.

**MR. COX:** But they didn't approach you?

**COL. PORTER:** Well, they did, finally, but some of them were doing aerobatics. I guess trying to show us they had a helluva airplane. I don't know what the hell it was, but anyway, we got into it. I shot one down and up there about 20 some odd thousand feet and my wing man got one, I think, that day. I also got a probable that day, and I shot another one off of a tail of a Navy pilot. He saw me that night at the movie, he looked me up. "Where's Captain Porter?" He saved my life." This guy, this Zero was right on his ass just bonk and he was just behind his armor plate, you know. That's what we were always taught.

**MR. COX:** So you kinda crouched down?

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh.

**MR. COX:** Small target.

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, heard old Jeff LeBlanc talk about the time he was shot down, it was bouncing off his armor plate. But this guy was getting the hell shot out of him, and so I just happened to see this plane way off to the side where it was coming down and so I said, "Phil, let's go," and so we went down, he was my wing man. And I came in too fast or I could've blown the guy right out of the thing, but I got some shells into him, and then he pulled up and I couldn't get another shot at him, but I think I got him as he was smokin'. But I never could claim him so he was damaged, you know, and Phil said "You got it, you got it, Bruce." We went back to the intelligence office, you know, and reported the action. They said, "You can't really claim that one, Bruce." At any rate, that was my last good engagement.

**MR. COX:** I noticed on your biography that you had a double kill one night. Would you tell us a little bit?

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, that was a night fighter, later on in my career.

**MR. COX:** Could you explain a little bit about that, what type of aircraft it was, the weapons involved?

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, that goes into another area of getting out of Guadalcanal and coming back to the States. I helped form the night fighters squadron, a night fighter group.

**MR. COX:** Now, were you still flying Corsairs?

**COL. PORTER:** I was flying. I was instructing at El Toro. What we did there, Bill, was we had six or seven students, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lts., and I was a Captain, and we, I was their boss, you know, they didn't report to anybody but Captain Porter, Bruce Porter. I took 'em through a syllabus of training because I had the combat experience. We call it combat training. I'd take them off at the sleeves, we'd go out and get drunk at night and we'd take 'em cross country and we'd do all these things. We were real pals, you know. I guess I never found out whatever happened to any of those guys, but at any rate, then I was there at El Toro for a period of time and then they asked for volunteers to go into a new night fighter program, F6F's, which I volunteered for and so did Wally Sigler, a pal of mine, who was also a Guadalcanal vet. We went back to Cherry Point, North Carolina. Now Cherry Point was a beautiful base. You know, last time I was there it was a sandlot. So that's when we formed this night fighter group which I went through a lot of training with. Then we went down to Vero Beach, Florida, for

intensified training for about nine months of night work and all types of instrument training and radar training. So we had the squadron. Finally after about 6-9 months, we were ordered to the West Coast. We all flew out to El Centro and then we went from El Centro, I was there for, well, for awhile, at the air base there. At one point, Jim McGuire, the skipper, said, "Bruce, would you be interested in taking a squadron aboard the first all marine carrier, night fighter squadron?" I said "That sounds interesting," and so I went aboard the, it was the Fifth Wing. I went aboard this carrier, a small carrier USS BLOCK ISLAND, CV102 class. We went through maneuvers and all those type of things, out to sea at Santa Barbara, and carrier qualified. We had a terrible thing happen, in fact, I talked to Admiral Tom Moorer about this guy who was the skipper of the carrier. We had some tremendous casualties up there due to his inefficiency of weather and keeping us out in the air, making us go back out again, one day and one night. We lost about 15 guys, and I don't know exactly 10-15 guys and airplanes. So then I was stationed in Goleta, Santa Barbara, and in El Centro, and North Island at the same time, because I had to be connected with all those things, you know. We were operating out of North Island where the carrier was based, you know, right off the coast. Then I had to go up to Goleta because I had a boss up there and then I had a carrier boss and I was sorta of all in between that. But finally, after we did all of our carrier activities, we headed for the Pacific and out to war. And that's when I was taken off the carrier and I was reassigned as squadron commander down in Okinawa, BMF and 542.

**MR. COX:** Okay, now, Okinawa is where you did the night fighter and would you consider that to be some of your major experiences during the war?

**COL. PORTER:** Oh, very much so. You see, what you're talking about, Okinawa was part of Japan, and this was a Japanese Island, so you can imagine how it was going to be defended. We were briefed that Okinawa was gonna be just about the toughest, just like invading the island of Japan, so we expected one helluva battle down there. By the time we got down there the Marines had landed. We got in there about a month after they'd landed and secured the island, so we went in to Yon Tan, which was a Japanese field, a big field. I was with another squadron. I flew in there with 533 and then I was reassigned as skipper of 542 and that is when we had night patrols. We'd go up for 4 or 5 hours circling with a radar person directing our activities, you see. He'd have us on the screen and all that type of a thing, and it was broken up like a pie, Okinawa was. There were four sectors and there would be an airplane in each sector so that we covered all the way from Japan, from Formosa, from China anything that would be coming in. We had picket ships about two-three hundred miles out and they took a helluva big pounding. We probably took the worst beating the Navy ever had. Our job was to make sure that kamakazes didn't come in and get 'em, you see. We'd circle for a period of time and have to be in a situation where we'd be on alert protecting the island, protecting the shipping. On this one particular night, Bill Balance, who was my controller, indicated there was some bogey coming. We'd get bogies down there, you see, B-29s would be coming from China to bomb Japan and from Saipan and they'd get lost. I mean weather was tremendous, you know, and radios would go out and we'd intercept anything that showed up on Control radar. We'd always have to make visual contact because we didn't want to shoot down our own airplanes. This night I got this inbound bogey so I did a flight, I think it was about 12-15,000 feet, and I came in on it and it was a Nick, a twin-engine Japanese night fighter. We later found out it came from Formosa. Well, I blew him up and I never realized that that Nick had armament on those things, just tremendous, they had a fifty caliber on the top of it, and they had a guy in there who could operate all that. And I had no idea but I got this guy before he even saw me. I blew him right up. Then I circled after I had identified it and then I had another bogey in the next 15 minutes or so. Bill Balance factored me in on it. It was a Betty, that was

a twin-engine Japanese bomber, and unbeknownst to me it had a bacca bomb. They carried a bacca bomb underneath the carriage. I thought I saw something underneath the Betty, and so I moved in on it. I had the first airplane with four 20-millimeter cannons. I authorized that to the squadron as an experiment. They didn't know how it'd work out because of the jarring of the ammunition and all of that, and I tested it out quite a bit before. I had it put in my airplane and I was the first one of the night fighters that had one. But Bob Barrick had them later on, he being the first all night Marine ace. He had his put in after mine in another squadron. At any rate these twenty millimeters, you know four 20's really put out. I moved into this damn Betty and I let him have it, you know. He blew up, and the damnedest explosion you ever wanta see occurred. Well, the bacca bomb had this huge bomb on it, beneath it, you know. It jarred the hell out of me and I called Balance, (my Controller) and said, "My God." He said "yeh", he saw it. He said "That's three times the amount of a flash that we've ever seen on the screen." I said, "Well, I think it was a bacca bomb," you know, and so I never got confirmation. They should have given me three, but they only gave me two and a bacca bomb.

**MR. COX:** May I ask a question? The bacca, bomb, had you been alerted that they potentially were in the area, or was it a complete surprise?

**COL. PORTER:** Oh, yes.

**MR. COX:** What was it?

**COL. PORTER:** A Bacca bomb, we later got to know about them from these guys from Japan during our occupation. It was a manned-controlled bomb. They laid on their belly and they maneuvered the thing like this, and it had about an hour or two hours fuel, and they'd drop it with a rocket-type of a propeller. They'd drop it mostly from the Betty's. I think they had 'em in some of the other transports, but Betty's mostly. They would go right into a ship with the bacca bomb, man and all. They had them down in the Philippines, too. When we went in on the occupation, we went into Yokosuka, and that's where they trained. We had these guys waitin' on us. The bacca bomb pilots were 15-16 years old.

**MR. COX:** So it was kinda like a ....

**COL. PORTER:** Man-made suicide bomb.

**MR. COX:** Yeh, most everyone has heard about the kamikazes.

**COL. PORTER:** The bacca bomb was just like the kamikazes. It was a kamikaze bomb, really. At any rate, I got that but I never got credit for it. All I got out of it was what I said to Balance and it went all the way up to the commandant and everything else.

**MR. COX:** Was that the last of your kills?

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh.

**MR. COX:** And what category did that put you into at that time?

**COL. PORTER:** Ace category.

**MR. COX:** That's a total of?

**COL. PORTER:** I had, well, I count the bacca bomb with six and then I had four probables, but they never counted the bacca bomb, so officially in the Marine Corps, I have five kills and one probable. I call it six and four probables for a total of ten, but they never give me the credit for all that.

**MR. COX:** At one time, just a minute ago, you mentioned something about commanders. Did you find that all your commanding officers were quality officers, or how would you categorize some of your officers?

**COL. PORTER:** I'd say ninety percent of the Marine Corps of my commanding officers were outstanding men, but this one Navy captain that I bring out in my book. I told Tom Moorer about it. "Sir," I said, "This guy never should have allowed us to go back out on the second flight that night thing because the weather was coming in." He (the Captain) called me in his quarters and he said, "Well, do you think I should launch this next strike, Porter?", and I said, "No sir" I said, "definitely not." I said "The weather is coming in off the coast and we have unqualified pilots." I had five day landings and hardly any at night and I knew we were gonna lose some people and that's what happened. I went back to my quarters and I thought they would, and he said, "Why don't you report to your planes, launch your strike?" And the night fighter pilots were the only guys that had no casualties. They lost, I think, three or four Corsairs and one TBF that had three people on it and I think two of them went down, and that was uncalled for.

**MR. COX:** Was this due to the landing operation or navigation problems?

**COL. PORTER:** Navigation problems. They couldn't get back aboard and they couldn't find where there was an airfield that was off of San Clemente. They ran into a mountain and then one of 'em got off the coast out by Bakersfield and ran into a mountain out there. It was just bad. During my command, I relieved a Marine officer that refused to fly at night. So this happened, you know. It was very rare, I'd say.

**MR. COX:** A little bit of change of subject, earlier you mentioned in your training where you got a cut across your nose. Did you have any other injuries or anything as a result of your experiences?

**COL. PORTER:** Yes, aboard the carrier, I had, let's see, I had three barriers I cracked up and I landed one night with my wheels up. What had happened is a plane ahead of me had run into the island and caught on fire and the pilot was seriously injured but okay, and they had to shut down operations for about an hour or forty-five minutes or so. I was circling and I was pretty damned nervous. It was night time, you know, and it was a black night and when I finally got to come in, I saw the landing signal officers, (the guys with the patch). They stood up on the back part of the aft of the ship and they have behind them a big screen, like a campus screen, so that they they wouldn't get blown off into the ocean and below that they had a net so if one of the guys starts coming in, they can dive into the net. Well, behind the landing signal officer they had a private first class or private Marine, whose job was to tell whether the flaps were down, wheels down, and full pitch, or something like that. They couldn't tell the pitch but they did give them three things, that's all they had to think about, you see. But this guy that was doing that didn't tell me my wheels weren't down, and so I came in flat on the mat. I was so damned nervous that I forgot to put my wheels down when I gave

him my landing and landed with my wheels up. They had satellite carriers out there we'd been practicing on. This was off of Hawaii and here again I thought, well, I'll get my ass chewed. I was a Major at that time. The skipper of the ship came down, a full Captain, climbs up by the engine and says, "Okay, Major?" I said, "Yes, Sir." He said, "Don't worry about it, we'll push it over the side."

**MR. COX:** But there were no serious injuries?

**COL. PORTER:** No, sir.

**MR. COX:** Just ego effect.

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, ego effect.

**MR. COX:** But you were very lucky.

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, so I did that. I had a couple of barriers and things.

**MR. COX:** At what point in time and where were you when you heard that the war was over?

**COL. PORTER:** Okinawa. We were there when the three Bettys came in from Japan with the surrender party. You know, I had slides of it. I didn't realize you could have slides (at the Symposium). I have some beautiful slides on that and they came in with red crosses on them. They were all painted white, you see. And they landed at Ie Shima where we'd come into. They landed at Ie Shima and they had a DC4 take them to the Philippines to MacArthur. That's where they made all their arrangements, you know, for the surrender. That brings up an interesting story I tell in a slide presentation. I tell it because they (the Bettys) weren't in very good shape, spark plugs and things like that they needed. They fixed 'em up pretty well at Iwo Jima but they stayed there, they didn't fly anywhere else. They flew 'em back, I think. Well, I'll get on with my story. They went down, the delegation, how many of them I can't remember, went down in a DC4 to Manilla, and met with MacArthur and his staff. They outlined all the situation like they wanted things and we wanted things and all that type of things, you know, the war deal. So everything was grounded. Not a single plane in the air when those guys landed the three planes. I guess there were no planes in the air for about twenty-four hours before they went down and came back. One of those planes that came into Japan had an engine go out and landed in the water with some of these guys with all their papers. I tell this in my story or my talk that I give. They had one of the all American or all- Olympic American or all-American, sorta like Japanese swimmers, olympic swimmers from the '36 Olmypics. You know, a helluva swimmer. I forget the ranks, but I think he was an army general, Japanese general, had these papers, so he gave 'em to this guy and says you're supposed to be the best swimmer, so we're giving you these papers so we can get them to the ----. So they landed and he gets knocked out. You know, they landed in the water and he was knocked out, so they had to pull him out and save him. One of the other guys, that could swim a little better, pulled him out and drug him ashore.

**MR. COX:** So that was the negotiations for the surrender officially?

**COL. PORTER:** Yeh, and they had all the papers, you see, from that they had a lot of different things they wanted. MacArthur wanted one of the Japanese with each one of our people and so he wanted to get inoculation shots, you know, and things like this. We didn't, you know, we went in right after that. Our group went into Yokohama, right in where the Navy base was. We went in

period. We went in to take over that base, and the Marines had moved in. I was in the group at that time, I was taken out of the squadron. I moved and my office was the old Japanese admiral's headquarters. I'll never forget this. Jack Crabb, was an executive officer and they used to have some war crime admiral, bad boy, they were gonna try. He would be executed later on. They brought him into the office every morning. Those Marine guards went right by my desk. They stood him at attention and they run him in to the executive officer, and he would read his ass off every morning screaming at him. He was a good actor, too, this Marine, he was a Lt. Col. We'd just laugh like hell. Then he'd have the Jap Admiral do an about face and march back to the guardhouse.

**MR. COX:** When you finally came back to the States, how did you come back?

**COL. PORTER:** Well, that's another funny story. You know, I was there about four months on the occupation. I was regular Marine Corps. I got a letter from my Mother saying that my Dad was quite ill, and was gonna have an operation. I went into Toby Mundt, who was my group commander, later on the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps. I showed him my letter and he read it and he said, "Well, you're about due, Bruce" he says, "I'll give you thirty days leave and", he says, "See what happens when you get back to the States", he says. "I think maybe you'll get reassigned and come back otherwise you gotta come back again." I said, "Okay, Sir", so I had priority transportation. I could take air, sea, or whatever they gave me. Well, unbeknownst to many people, airplanes were going down like mad out there. See, all the guys gettin' out of the service were top pilots who were going back to the airlines. They were going back and they had points, these guys had hundreds of points so they could go out. Well, due to inexperienced people and a lot of inexperienced guys on the ground, the airplanes weren't maintained good. So I thought, well, I want to get back so I'm going to go by sea. I couldn't find a ship or anything, so two other pilots, Marine pilots, and I had orders. So we got out into a gig in the harbor there in Tokyo. We had our baggage, our gear, and we went from boat to boat. They would tell us "We're full up, move on boys. Move on. Get off, get that thing out of the way and soon." Finally we were way out, way out in the harbor and it's getting dark, I can still remember that vividly, and here's a destroyer bobbling up and down. We decided well, let's give them a try, so we pulled up there and some Lt. or so sticks his head, and says "What do you boys want?" We said, "We're looking for a way back to the States. Do you think you've got room for three Marine pilots?" He said, "You guys saved our ass so many times, let me talk to the skipper." So this red faced guy comes over. He was a Lt. Commander and the nicest guy. He says "Come on aboard, boys." And they made room for us. So we shoved off that night, and we were gone. I didn't even go back, I had my orders in my pocket, and we took off and in about an hour they had the thing underway. They were getting their ship ready to go back to have it mothballed in San Diego. We took the great circle, and that was the first I heard of the great circle. We ran into some heavy seas on the way. We, three Marine pilots, were the only guys on the ship who weren't sick. While we were on shipboard, we'd go out and shoot with them, and all that kind of thing, killing time. I got to know the Skipper and executive officer quite well. One day the Skipper said, "You guys want to stop in Hawaii for a coupla days?" We said, "We're at your command, Sir." He said, "Well, we're gonna put in there and give you guys a little break in Hawaii." So they pulled in and they let us off for a coupla days and we had a little leave. Later he says, "You know what? My orders are to go directly from here to San Diego but you damn Marines you did such a wonderful job out there we're taking you right into San Francisco." So they did and they dropped us off. It was like we had hitchhiked our way back to the States after the war was over. We got our orders there in San Francisco and caught that train down to Los Angeles. I was married, you see. Did I mention that?



**MR. COX:** Yes, you did.

**COL. PORTER:** Well, I was supposed to meet my wife and she didn't show up at the train. I said, "This sounds funny." My Mother said "Did you get a letter from Gretchen?" I said, "Well, I got some letters." Mom said, "I think you're going to get some bad news." I said, "Oh, really, Mom?" "She wasn't a very good girl anyway." She was from a wealthy family, Pasadena family. So I said, "Okay" so I get down there and sure enough I met her in the hotel there, the Cortez Hotel, the only Cortez in San Diego. In the lobby and she tells me she wants a divorce. So that sorta stuck me, you know, and so I said "Okay" and there's not much I can do about it. At any rate, she had my red convertible Ford, and she kept every penny that I'd sent her in a bank account for me. I mean, you know, she didn't need the money or anything and she kept a couple of my medals and things I used to have from swimming. I said, "Can I have my medals?" She said, "No, I want those." At any rate, we went back up to LA and I went down with her to the bank and later I got an annulment. I said goodbye and never saw her again.

**MR. COX:** Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us about? I think that's a remarkable story, Col. I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Museum for your time and patience in the telling of your story.

**COL. PORTER:** Bill, it's been a pleasure.

**MR. COX:** Personally, I'd like to thank you for what you did and I certainly can feel the emotions of all your experiences, especially your trip back home. And I would like to, at this point and time, put on the tape that Col. R. Bruce Porter presently lives in Redmond, Oregon, and he has a web site and that web site is [web.coinet.com/squigleybruce](http://web.coinet.com/squigleybruce). In case that doesn't work, we'll put it in the report. And thank you again, sir.

**COL. PORTER:** A real pleasure.

Transcribed by Eunice Gary, December, 2000.