The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)

Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with
Mr. Henry Castle, Colonel USAF (Ret.)
February 21, 2001

By William G. Cox

Today is February 21, 2001. I am William G. Cox representing the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. I will be doing an oral history today with Mr. Henry Castle who flew with the 8th Air Force out of England and participated in many missions over Europe. We are in the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas and this particular interview is taking place in the Bush Gallery. And without ado I would like to introduce Mr. Henry Castle.

Mr. Cox: Good afternoon Mr. Castle.

Mr. Castle: Good afternoon Bill.

Mr. Cox: To start off perhaps you can give me a little information on your background. Where were you born?

Mr. Castle: I was born in my parent's old homestead house in Abilene, Texas in 1923 in the bedroom of the house and the doctor made a house call for this event. I grew up in Abilene, went to high school there until, of course, the war came along and I volunteered into the U.S. Army Air Corps for Pilot Flight Training as an Aviation Cadet.

Mr. Cox: For research purposes in some future time if you don't mind—the name of your parents.

Mr. Castle: Henry, I'm a Jr., Henry G. Castle was my father, he was the son of a rancher in west Texas, Jefferson Davis Castle who left his father's (Henry A. Castle) New Castle Plantation situated on Bayou Masingouin, Irbrville Parish, Baton Rouge, Louisiana when he sold it in 1859 just before the Civil War and prior to his moving to Hillsboro, Texas in 1861. He then

moved on to Bryan, Texas, where my father, H.G. Castle was born in 1893.

Mr. Cox: Was your mother born in Texas?

Mr. Castle: Yes, she was born in Hillsboro, Texas, the second daughter of Sant C. Gist and Manie Heath Gist in May 1900 and died in 1965. My mother was Mary May Gist and her mother was of the Heath family of Cleburne, Texas. Her dad was of the Gist family who, I think, came from Georgia and Tennessee. I guess we're all pretty much southern!

Mr. Cox: So all of your schooling was in Abilene?

Mr. Castle: Yes, I graduated from Abilene high school—the "Abilene Eagles"—Class of 1942.

Mr. Cox: So when you went into the Service, did you have any college training at that time?

Mr. Castle: No.

Mr. Cox: What is the date you went in the Service?

Mr. Castle: I was called to active duty on December 27, 1942 with orders to go to Aviation Cadet Flight Training. They asked me to report on December 27, 1942.

Mr. Cox: You did take some tests?

Mr. Castle: Yes, at first you had to have two years of college and then when they dropped that requirement I was allowed to take the tests. Since I wasn't a very good student in high school, I just passed it. I always wanted to hunt, play sports and hang around the pilots and airplanes with L.E. Derryberry at the Abilene Municipal Airport. One of his Instructor Pilots, J.C. Collier, gave me a ride in his Fairchild and that was great!

Mr. Cox: What year was that?

Mr. Castle: That was the summer of 1940.

Mr. Cox: Along that line do you remember where you were on December 7th, 1941?

Mr. Castle: Yes, I sure do. I was stretched out on the living room floor reading the Sunday funnies, and we heard the announcement on our old Dumont radio. I believe it was President Roosevelt's address to the people telling us that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu with 400 (actually 36) aircraft flown from carriers from the north, destroying and damaging over 200 aircraft and sinking or damaging all 8 battleships in the harbor.

Mr. Cox: Was that somewhat of a shock to you?

Mr. Castle: Oh, yes, I dropped the paper down and thought; well I'm 18 and I'm probably going into the Service to war. I didn't have any

other thought about it; I was going to go—I wanted to fly and serve my country as a fighter pilot.

Mr. Cox: At the time you graduated from high school and you took your tests, did you have any desire to enlist in any Service other than the Army Air Corps?

Mr. Castle: No. If you look in my high school annual for Abilene High School, Class of '42, I was asked what I wanted to do when I graduated. I couldn't believe that I said I wanted to go to Randolph Field and become a pilot. Everybody else had other various and sundry ideas.

Mr. Cox: Randolph was pretty impressive.

Mr. Castle: Yes, it certainly was, but ever since I stretched out on a hill in the buffalo grass on my grandfather's ranch, staring at a circling hawk against a blue sky; I wanted to explore the unknown. You know how it is—you're young, growing up, and everything is so new and uncertain. I could barely hear a noise in the sky—I looked up and heard the sound of an airplane engine. It was a high wing monoplane and I said, " I wish I was up there—I would like to know how he flies like that." The thought of flying never left me. I was about seven years old when I saw my first airplane. I still think I remember seeing Charles Lindberg when he stopped in Abilene for fuel in the "Spirit of St. Louis" on his national tour after crossing the Atlantic in 1927.

Mr. Cox: So you wanted to be a pilot for many years?

Mr. Castle: Yes I did. Ever since I was 4 years old and rode on my father's shoulders, I wanted to fly and be high above the earth. Al the time I was in school, I daydreamed about flying. I remember Ms. Cunningham rapping my knuckles with a ruler as she scolded me, "you're drawing airplanes again on your tablet." I not only daydreamed in class but also drew cars and boats—but mostly airplanes.

Mr. Cox: When you were inducted into the Army, it was called the Army Air Force at that time wasn't it?

Mr. Castle: No, it was the Army Air Corps in those days.

Mr. Cox: What was the first base you were assigned to?

Mr. Castle: Well, I was sent to camp over in Mineral Wells. We had to go there and be "on hold" for, apparently, they had gotten a great influx of cadets going in and then we were sent to Hondo Field at San Antonio. We stayed there nearly a month doing physical training and basics until we were sent to the Aviation Cadet Center in San Antonio, Texas to start our pilot training as Class 44-A.

Mr. Cox: Did you ever make it to Randolph Field?

Mr. Castle: After graduating from Advance Training at Aloe Field, Victoria, Texas as Single Engine Pilot flying AT-6 "Texans", we were slated to go to P-40 training; but the upper part of the alphabetical listing on the orders involved one-third of us; and we were immediately sent to be trained as Flight instructors CIS on Randolph Field. That was the worst news I could have had—I didn't want to do that—I wanted to go overseas and fly fighters in combat.

Mr. Cox: How long were you in the Flight Instructor School?

Mr. Castle: We had to go to Central Instructor School at Randolph Field for 30 days and then I instructed for about two months. They finally sent five of us who finally wore our Commander down, requesting to be transferred to fighter training in the 1st AF on the East Coast. Every week we went in and one day, he came out and said, "Okay, you guys. I'm getting rid of you; you're not going to hound me anymore! You're going to the First Air Force for training in the P-47 "Thunderbolt"—Good news at last! He said, "Good luck Boys" as we saluted happily.

Mr. Cox: Where was that located?

Mr. Castle: That was on the East Coast at 3 different airfields. First I went to P-40 training at Tallahassee, Florida, and then that was stopped and we went up to P-47 training in Richmond, Virginia, First Air Force. We also trained in Goldsboro, North Caroline and Wilmington, North Carolina. After being rated "Combat Ready", we were sent to Camp Kilmer—Port of New York

and shipped out overseas to England. Some of us went to the Pacific; my best friend went to the Pacific and I went to Europe and was transferred to the 8 AF. Others were assigned to the 9th AF on the continent.

Mr. Cox: In P47's?

Mr. Castle: Yes. We went over on the "Queen Elizabeth" out of New Jersey, Camp Kilmer and the New York Harbor across the Atlantic to Glasgow, Scotland.

Mr. Cox: You were actually stationed in England—correct?

Mr. Castle: Yes; we entered the Firth of Clyde and landed at Greenock in the Port of Glasgow in Scotland and embarked by train southward to RAF Station called Stone in Central England. After checking in, we received some personal equipment and overseas briefings on England and the RAF. We were sent down to Shrewsbury and went west to a base called Atchum Field for 8th AF pre-combat training as Fighter replacement pilots. All of the people who went before me were original members of their groups. All of the groups went overseas together as a complete group. I went over as a replacement pilot and Atchum Field was where all of the replacement pilots had to go. Then we went by rail to the various groups we were assigned to in the 8th Fighter Command throughout East Anglia.

Mr. Cox: I would assume that when you integrated into the unit, there was basic indoctrination of a certain amount of time or flight hours you had to have?

Mr. Castle: Yes, we had to do local training and we had to check out in the type of aircraft we would be flying. We then received combat tactics and formation flying as required for combat readiness. Today, I still teach formation flying for the Confederate Air Force and several other organizations who participate in air shows in compliance with the nationally recognized "FAST" Program to ensure Safe Standardized Methods of Flying Airshow Acts. You fly formation almost every day in military combat-ready Air Force Fighter Groups, and military fighter groups. You become very proficient as a result of this training. My early combat training was to ensure I could fly formation the way the way the group was going to fly. One day, your Flight Leader put you on his wing, took off, told you to "move in close, talking you on the R.T., get a little closer—now move up just a little, drop down a little—stack down just a little bit, now move out a little. "There", he said, "Look at your position now, look at my airplane; that's where I want to see you every day!" And that was the extent of my pre-mission briefing, and I better do it right every mission! Formation flying was the essential factor to ensure the group of three squadrons delivered all of its striking power together in one compact force for maximum effect.

Mr. Cox: What was that line-up position? What did you orient in order to find that?

Mr. Castle: We flew in a Finger Four pattern of 2 elements of 2 aircraft each, protecting and looking out for the others on a 450 line emanating from the Leader's cockpit and stacked down slightly and behind the Leader's wing tip. We flew very close when in clouds or fog from the deck up in the English fog, which is real thick. I've actually seen the fog so thick I'm flying off my Leader and I lose sight of his fuselage, but I can see his wing tip. Now people don't believe it was that thick but it was on many occasions, your wing is almost tucked under his wing. When you can't see his fuselage that is a thick fog! You stay there until you break put on top of the clouds below you. If you flew Bomber Escort long-range missions from England into deep Germany, you often dropped down to give low level tactical support and attack Luftwaffe airfields. You got all kinds of formation experience and getting shot at by everyone in Germany! Then you had to climb back up to high altitude to find your way back to England, avoid the jet stream winds and let down through that same bad weather you took off in—then go again—across the English Channel the next day!

Mr. Cox: At the time you were doing that, approximately how many hours of flight time would you estimate you had?

Mr. Castle: I had about--let's see--I had about 180 out of flying school—90 as Instructor and 72 P-47 training time for an approximate 342 hours total when I flew my first mission.

Mr. Cox: When you were flying that close together, I'm not that familiar with P-47's--do they fly with a hydraulic system boost? How sensitive were the controls?

Mr. Castle: We had no boosted controls. The P47 was very sensitive—had a high rate of roll, faster than a P51, faster than an ME-109 or 190... Faster than a spitfire. But it did not have any hydraulic boosted control and only the flaps and gear were hydraulically operated.

Mr. Cox: So the feel of the controls was very sensitive?

Mr. Castle: Oh, very. You don't move it more than this, about like maybe 2 inches from enter line either way, but if you were in combat "dog fight" with an enemy aircraft, control movements would be abrupt, quick, and often, coordinating turns with power, RPM control, aileron and elevator control, kicking rudder, sometimes changing flap settings and, at the same time, knowing your "situation awareness" condition.

Mr. Cox: It was a hydraulic system that controlled that?

Mr. Castle: No, we had no boost. That's just the way they were rigged with cables and pushrods for the P-47 and P-51. The only boost we had was water injection to the engine and the hydraulic turbo super charger of the PWR-2800 engine, 2000 hp.

Mr. Cox: Do you remember the approximate date you flew your first combat mission?

Mr. Castle: I could look it up, let's see. I haven't thought of it very much— somewhere around the first week in October 1944, probably the 8th or 9th.

Mr. Cox: Approximately how long was it after you got into England?

Mr. Castle: I think it must have been--I didn't fly my first combat mission until I'd been in England 3 weeks.

Mr. Cox: You were assigned to the 8th Air Force. Can you tell me what fighter mission?

Mr. Castle: I was first assigned to the 56th Fighter Group, 62 Fighter Squadron, P-47 and later transferred to the 361 Fighter Group, 376 Fighter Squadron, P-51 "Mustangs".

Mr. Cox: What was the first combat mission you flew--an escort mission?

Mr. Castle: The first mission I flew was bomber escort to the I.P. - Fighter Escort for the 2nd and 3rd Air Division. Flying P-47 "Thunderbolts" covering many bombers combined with land and airborne operations flying P-47 "Thunderbolts" in Holland and Belgium at 26,000'.

Mr. Cox: You were escorting what type of aircraft?

Mr. Castle: We were escorting the 2nd Air Division, B-24 Bombers and some of the 3rd Air Division B-17 Bombers at 2600'. We could not go all the way to target due to our short range of "1.7 hours in and 1.7 out"---we only had a 150-gallon belly drop tank; later we would change to one 150 gallon tank under each wing for more range.

Mr. Cox: How long was your mission on that typical escort?

Mr. Castle: A typical mission time was 3 hours and 10-20 minutes average with the P-47 "Thunderbolt", even with 150-gallon belly drop tank. We went on some short support missions but most of the time we were on escort. The mission time was less when we went to France to fly tactical support for "Watch Over The Rhine, Battle of the Bulge" in the Bastogne, Ardennes area, flying P-51 "Mustangs". Our missions there were short which made the mission time go down. After I was assigned to the 361 Fighter Group, 376 SOD, our mission time was much longer, usually from 4.30 to nearly 7 hours sometimes. Most missions were around 4.30 to 5 hours.

Mr. Cox: And did you escort the bombers clear to target or some point short of target?

Mr. Castle: The P-47 could not go deep but we could go to Berlin after converting to P-51 with the 361 FTR GRP with two 108-wing drop tanks. Most of the time, we took the bombers all the way in and out of target. In the latter part of the war, General

Jimmy Doolittle sent us out on his "Search and Destroy" Mandate and we were supposed to go down and hit specified air fields or targets straight in, to knock out the aircraft on the ground. Coming home we were supposed to shoot anything moving because we were ordered to stop all surface movement of the German armies. We just stopped everything eventually. Some of the missions were dive bomb attacks to support Patton's armor and infantry in the "Battle of the Bulge."

Mr. Cox: Would these be described as targets of opportunity?

Mr. Castle: Yes, airfields, barges in the canals, trains, etc. We'd shoot up any of the boats on the rivers and canals and any vehicle moving. I would not shoot horses drawing a cart; I never shot them--I would destroy the cart but not the horses. I know some guys who did, but I didn't. I grew up with horses.

Mr. Cox: You mentioned giving support to Patton. What stage of the war was that? Was that related to anything around the Battle of the Bulge?

Mr. Castle: That's what it was when Patton broke across from his southern position and came in there with his armor to help Bradly and Hodges. We gave low support; we were working, coordinating with the 9th Air Force and sometimes the mission would be escorting
B-26s, B-25s and B-17s on a short escort. Then we would go on patrol and give ground support for a particular area on the

bomb line. We'd take out a specific target with dive and skip bombing missions - 250 and 500 lb. Bombs. Earlier in the year, we lost our Group Commander, Colonel Jack Christian, on a dive-bombing mission in the Arras area of France. He took a direct hit by 88 cannon and 20 mm. Fire and he went straight in. Dive and skip bombing was very dangerous against the Jerry 20 mm. Guns and 88 cannon.

Mr. Cox: How were the G forces involved on the dive bombing and strafing missions?

Mr. Castle: We did not strafe on dive bombing runs—maybe later on if we had enough fuel left. You were in a dive, with the P-47 we did it a little differently, with the P-47 we entered at about the same level, Mustangs or P-47s. We transitioned from P-47s to P-51s, but we'd start out and roll over at about--sometimes 15,000' to 20,000'--depending on what we were carrying. We'd carry 500 pounders or 150s and the P-47, you had to pull out a little sooner because it had a mushing effect. We never wanted to start out less than 3500', and we would dive down and pull out at around 1000 with 4-5G pullouts if done correctly. The P-51 was more responsive--it didn't mush like the heavier P-47. It was more agile at low levels; and if you were going to stay in the area or had to make a second run, you pull 4-5G's to get to initial altitude as quickly as possible.

Mr. Cox: About what kind of G's would you pull coming out of that dive?

Mr. Castle: If we were in a highly protected area, we would try to get upstairs just as fast as we could; we'd pull to 5 Gs sometimes—we would stay down low to get out of the area of our last pass and then climb for altitude.

Mr. Cox: Did you ever have any problem with blackout?

Mr. Castle: Before we got G-suits late in July of 1944, you could black yourself out easily. With added power the P-47 could turn tight and the P-51 would turn real tight…then we got our G-suits and that took away the blackout part. You could out-turn the enemy by keeping your eyesight and making quicker corrections to stay on him, because he was probably "blacking" or "graying out" also. No problem on the dive bomb run pullout. The G-suits worked great; you had to be sure the pressure regulator was set correctly.

Mr. Cox: Do you think there were any planes lost due to that problem of pilots blacking out?

Mr. Castle: On dive bombings?

Mr. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Castle: Oh, probably so, sometimes they would stay too long--what we called target fixation. They'd be concentrating completely on the target and forget about their "situation awareness" where they were in relation to the target terrain; sometimes there would be mountains close by or some other obstruction. They

would then stay too long and not be able to pull out in time, and speed would build up too much. One guy blacked out so long, the ground gunners got him as he almost went into a stall.

Mr. Cox: About what would your estimated speed be?

Mr. Castle: If we were attacking a heavily defended target we might enter the dive from over 20,000' and in the P-47, we would pick up 480 or 500 mph in the dive. Normally though, we'd build up about 400 to 450 mph. We would pick up 430 to 450 in our dive. Now, in the P-51, since it was "slicker and quicker" we had to watch our acceleration carefully because we would get to 500 mph in a hurry!

Mr. Cox: Is that close to the limits of the aircraft?

Mr. Castle: Yes, I've seen over 500. If you're up at altitude, your controls will stiffen up and the controls will freeze on you. If you go much past 525 mph—you also must be careful to not pull too many Gs at that speed. If you weigh 150 lbs. and pull 5 Gs, your equivalent body weight is 750 lbs.

Mr. Cox: Does it take a little bit of strength to pull it out of one of those?

Mr. Castle: Well, you've got to pull pretty good, yes. The Mustang was tougher; the ailerons were stiffer and especially if you got

past 470. The Mustang was difficult to turn at high speed, sometimes due to stiff aileron control. The P-47 didn't give you any trouble and you could whip around pretty good in a tight climbing turn. At 5 Gs if your hand slips off the throttle, rpm level, or stick or if your foot comes off the rudder pedal, there is no way you can get it back there until the "G" forces fall off to maybe 2 Gs.

Mr. Cox: And the P-47 was designed later than the P-51?

Mr. Castle: No, it was first. The P-47 shot more enemy aircraft down than the P-51, but the Mustang got most all the publicity. The P-47s started the war against the Luftwaffe and the Mustangs came on in later in 1943.

Mr. Cox: There were more Aces, I think, came from the P-47 pilots if I'm not mistaken. Is that true?

Mr. Castle: Yes, that was early in the war when there was a lot of things to shoot at and I'd say there were more P-47 Aces. All the 8 Fighter Groups except the 56 F.G. converted from the P-47s to P-51s. Later, I was transferred to the 361st Fighter Group. They had lost some pilots and they needed some experience over there. By that time, I was an element leader and was a Flight Leader at the end of the war in '45. Official Air Force statistics said that the P-47 destroyed more A/C than the P-51, both in the 8 AF and the 9 AF.

Mr. Cox: It was really kind of a statement--the fact that the P-47 probably had more Aces.

Mr. Castle: Yes, right. They had more Aces. We all converted to the Mustangs except for the 56 F.G. I think all the leading Aces probably had P-47 time initially, but statistics showed that against the German Luftwaffe, the P-47 pilots of the 8th, 9th, 12th and 15th Air Forces in England, France, Italy and North Africa shot down more A/C than the late coming P-51 in early 1943 until the end of the war in April 1945. The 56 F.G. in the 8 AF had the most victories in the ETO until Don Blakeslee's 4 F.G. flying P-47s and P-51s were allowed to count their Eagle Squadron victories.

Mr. Cox: Changing the question a little bit; but awhile back we were talking about the Battle of the Bulge. Were you involved in any of the actions when they were crossing the Rhine in support?

Mr. Castle: Yes, we flew several area support missions, all levels of tactical support, and when we were flying Mustangs; we went to Saint Dizier France and operated out of there. We then moved up to Chievres Airfield in Belgium and provided both short range bomber escort by our fighters and tactical low level support along the battle line as the ground forces of Bradley, Hodges, and Patton turned the German forces back and started their drive to the Rhine. 8 AF recalled my Group back to England, and we resumed long-range escort again into Germany and Holland. We flew several close support and escort for B-26

medium bombers when we were still giving tactical close support to the infantry and armor advancing of Hodges' and Patton's First and Third Armies advancing to the Rhine.

Mr. Cox: Were you flying at the end of the war?

Mr. Castle: Yes…our group flew its last mission on target escort on 20 April '45 in the Zwiesel area for 6 hours. At the end of the war, our group was scheduled to go to Japan for the Japanese invasion with rockets on our P-51s. We were going to go straight through the states without leave or delay because we had to support the invasion. We were flying up at a place called "The Wash" practicing, training and learning to shoot rockets using best "dive angles" for a given altitude painted with dive angle lines on our wings. You lined up the dive angle mark, on your target and then you rolled into a dive, holding the line mark on target in a steep dive. Some of the less experienced guys would go in with their dive too steep for the altitude they were at and we lost two of our younger pilots due to wing and tail failures from excessive speed build-up in the dive exceeding the design limits for the A/C.

Mr. Cox: These were P-51s?

Mr. Castle: Yes, we were operating at about 18,000 feet going into our dives and some held the dive angle too steep and long. That laminar flow airfoil by Davis achieved high speeds quickly. We did better using a more shallow dive angle and slower air speed build-up.

Mr. Cox: When they lost their wings and ++++++++++++++++++

Mr. Castle: One pilot bailed out and other did not. Such is the life of a fighter bomber pilot on tactical low-level missions.

Mr. Cox: Were they able to get out of those planes at such low altitude?

Mr. Castle: Not when they came apart. If you lose a wing on the fighter, it will just snap over and over and go in. It's completely out of control and almost impossible to get by overcoming gravity, high speed and centrifugal forces.

Mr. Cox: Do you think that all things considered that the training that you had leading up to your combat activities was adequate?

Mr. Castle: Oh, we had excellent training. If someone asks me why I keep flying—I tell him or her that I fly the AT-6 which is the WW II advance trainer and I teach air show and formation flying. I can look back and realize that we had the finest training of any Air Force pilots in the world--and all the fellows my age agree. I notice some of the dangerous and reckless flying that is done by young men that have inherited their dad's money and the first thing they want to do is buy a "War Bird" and fly--go to air shows--and show it off without receiving the experience and training they need. This, combined with bad judgment on their part and "doing some really dumb things" can

result in some very dangerous and sometimes deadly situations. My job as a check pilot with the Confederate Air Force and three other organizations; (EAA, Warbirds of America and NATA) is to check them out, giving them instruction in that kind of flying. I do it because it's the greatest satisfaction to see a guy who is making some bad errors in the beginning show so much improvement, 2 or 3 years later by performing really well at air shows and flying formation beautifully. This gives me feelings of satisfaction that are hard to describe and give thanks that I have been able to help someone become a good, safe pilot in airshow flying—that's a real payback for an ole WW II fighter pilot who loves airplane people!

Mr. Cox: These people were not necessarily army pilots?

Mr. Castle: No, some are but most received airline pilot training or private civilian training. There is a high interest for "War Birds" from WW II--it's a real hot thing now. But back to when I first got into airshow instruction in the sixties. The officials would ask me, "Well, how much formation time do you think you have?" They were going to make me a Flight Lead, an instructor, and Check Pilot. "Oh, I said, that's hard to estimate. I flew USAF fighters and I was lucky to be in a command position, line command, all the time in fighters. I was 'combat ready' on active duty in the Flying Air Reserve for 28 years. Nearly every day a fighter pilot flies formation so I will just have to guess at it—I guess maybe 4 or 5 thousand hours. Well, they couldn't believe it is so—maybe

more—because fighter pilots fly so many types of formation every time they fly.

Mr. Cox: Could I ask you if there was a particular mission that you flew that you consider to be the one that you remember the most?

Mr. Castle: The one that made you feel the worst. We went almost to Prague in Czechoslovakia to attack Pilson Airfield at nearly the end of the war. The mission lasted almost seven hours (6 hours and 35 minutes). We shot it up, beat it up, and headed home and coming out as I crossed through Germany, we stayed real low and I guess we were still in Czechoslovakia. When you shoot up an air drone, you stay low, go right through the treetops practically to avoid the "flak" and 20 mm fire all around the field. We're flying out of there and I'm looking for my Flight Leader up ahead. I drop down in this big hayfield and there's a guy in a hay wagon out there with two horses pulling it. I don't know how he heard me coming but he must have heard or seen one of the other airplanes going through. I'm almost where he is and I'm flying over him and he's raised up and threw his pitchfork at me. I thought, you sorry rascal." If I hadn't been trying to get out of the flak, and being low on fuel, I'd have turned around and paid him a visit. That was such a long mission, my crew chief had to pull me out of the cockpit and I finally got out and laid down on the wig, stretched my legs out and started doing exercises to get my circulation going. Then I kissed the wing of my Mustang and patted her, giving thanks to that beautiful "Merlin" engine.

Mr. Cox: Was there a time in any of these missions that you really felt like this might be the last mission for you--any close calls?

Mr. Castle: Oh, we got shot up several times on low level target attacks and damage from "8" flak on high altitude escort. When Doolittle issued the order to hit the deck after escort to the target and "Search and Destroy", we had to do it--it was needed--nothing wrong with the order, but when we went down to the lower altitudes and got into the flak and ground fire we started losing pilots real fast and I got shot up twice—at times pretty bad. In fact, one time I bellied a P-47 in near Great Yarmouth and wiped out, I believe they said, 27 or 28 saplings or trees up to about 3 inches in diameter. When I bellied that airplane in, I just barely made it out because the airplane rolled over upside down. The hydraulics were bad and I had lost all my oil. My engine gave up--froze—and visibility was bad. I was dead sticking gliding at the last part, but I did make the beach--I was a little bit fast and I went on into a bunch of trees--the last thing I saw was a big flash or something go by and then the airplane rolled a little bit and I finally crawled out of the airplane. There was no engine up there, just the firewall, the instrument panel and me. A P-47 does not glide—it descends very quickly! The engine had ripped off and gone behind me and I'd knocked off one wing completely and beat up the other one. Boy, when you knock a wing off a P-47, you've done something. It was a pretty bad wreck—totaled completely. I still have fond memories of that

Ole Great Yarmouth Lighthouse which showed me where the coast was in bad weather.

Mr. Cox: Did you ever have to bail out of an aircraft?

Mr. Castle: No, I got my feet in the seat of a Mustang coming back across the English Channel during wintertime '44 and I kept looking at that rough, gray, cold water and knowing I had 45 seconds to get in my dinghy or I would become immobilized by the cold sea and this was in December, '44. The cold sea, and I kept thinking, the engine, I'd blown my coolant once and the temperature was 140 on the peg and it's still running so I said wait a minute, I believe I'll wait until it quits. Got back down in my seat and I finally nursed that ole kite into Manston RAF Field and lapped the ole kite down 3 points taxied part way, heard a hiss and saw steam and heard a rumble in the engine and shut it off, jumped out and waited for a ride.

Mr. Cox: This was a matter of shortage of fuel.

Mr. Castle: No! coolant—absolutely none.

Mr. Cox: Okay, coolant.

Mr. Castle: Ethylene glycol, we call it "Prestone" in the States. We had a pop-off valve up there and that stuff, you didn't dare open your canopy when that stuff was blowing for it would be sucked right into the cockpit. But I could sure smell it and feel the heat.

Mr. Cox: So your canopy was pretty well covered with that stuff?

Mr. Castle: We had a bubble canopy on the P-51d, yes, I could smell it all over the place. I thought, "I'm just going to keep letting that coolant pop until I have to get out," but the danger to that is sometimes you'll have a fire burst out of the engine, but I thought I could make it. I was pretty high, but I kept staying with it and I finally made it with the help of God—up there somewhere.

Mr. Cox: At any time on those missions did you ever get involved in what you might describe as a dogfight?

Mr. Castle: Oh, yes, early on, my first encounter happened on one of those unstable, hazy days with a fast moving cool front with lots of build-ups with poor visibility and low clouds. We were trying to rejoin the rest of the squadron near Nijmegen. I was flying wing on another P-47, and we came around this cloud in a descending turn and looking through broken and scattered clouds. It was very hazy, we couldn't see very far ahead. But we could see below us. Suddenly, I saw this airplane coming straight at me, and I thought, "Here comes one of our guys; then I realize it's a 109, 109E and I think we both froze. It was such a rapid thing that reaction was not an option, and—ZOOM—we pass each other; he goes above me, made a move; and I look up in the mirror to see he's flying the same way I am--straight on, straight, and level! I think we both just scared the hell out of each other and wanted to get out of each

other's sight! That was my first mission; and I was pretty green. I missed that one, but later on, we were making some strikes up in Belgium and the Netherlands in the Low Countries when I shot down my first airplane—a gray and green camouflaged ME-109E. Again it was cloudy, and we were getting ready to go down in elements of two to attack an airfield. We get into the clouds and then we come out and my flight is off to one side and I'm flying No. 3 with wingman--he breaks off. About that time, I see a ME 109 right down below, and I got on the R.T. and said, There's a 109 right below us about a thousand feet, "I'm going after him." My wingman was out of sight, so I just peeled off and came back around the 109, flew right up his tail feathers and opened fire at about 250 yards. I observed strikes in his left wing root and then he burst into flames, rolled over and flew into the ground.

Mr. Cox: You don't think he ever got off a shot?

Mr. Castle: No, because he did not even know I came in behind him. I got strikes along the wing and you always try to hit a 109 right where the wing joins the fuselage cause you're going to damage flight controls, oil and fuel lines to the engine and hydraulics. Suddenly, smoke began pouring out of his engine, and I am blasting away and the airplane starts burning, rolls over and crashes in the field. That was one more enemy fighter that would attack any more of our bombers. The lesson of "see the enemy first" sticks with me.

Mr. Cox: I asked you about the lowest part of your experiences; is there a point and time when your emotions were really elated at something that happened?

Mr. Castle: Well, if we took care of our bombers, got them in, or if we met the bombers and picked them up, those times always created a great feeling because we didn't lose many of them. The 361st Fighter Group lost fewer bombers than anyone on escort because we stayed in the best areas around the bombers to protect them properly. The Group was commanded by General Bill Kepner, Commander of the 8 AF Fighter Command. We all had a job to do and you really feel great when you know you did your job. In talking about the down side, I guess the down side was two times I saw a B-17 blow up. He wasn't 2500 feet away from me, and he rolled over. The pilot was trying to make a recovery and then he gets hit again and rolls clear over--nose down--and boy, you know I'm saying, "Get out, get out, boy" and a chute comes out, "There's one, there's two," and two were all that ever got out. They just went straight in like that, and that's depressing—all 9 men gone down. Another time I was an element leader, but the flight was broken up and I just had my Wingman with me. We're coming across the English Channel-Air Sea Rescue "Colgate" called me while I was getting a steer from them to home base on Channel "D" saying, "Yorkshire 32, there's a B-17 right ahead of you, 3 miles, low, look for him." They asked me if I was in the clouds, and said, "He's reported he's below the clouds." Well, I had just gotten below the clouds at about 6 or 7 thousand feet so I kept on descending. Colgate said, "He should be less than a mile." I

said, "I see him; he's streaming smoke," so I pulled up to him, looked him over, wiggled my wings, and then pulled up, came back around again. Boy, he waved at me, and that's the only move I saw him make. We had number 1 feathered, no. 2 engine was smoking; he had number 3 engine trailing a thin, light steam of grey. He had 2 engines out, and #4 turning like mad, I guess he's using all the horsepower he has left. Air Sea Rescue called back again and said "he's in pretty bad shape, he's talking about bailing out". I said, "well, if he can stay airborne, keep him going, I'm with him and I sent my wingman up to 18,000' to give ASR DF stations along English Coast a long transmission count so they could keep him pointed with miles to go. The way ASR works they'll have at least three stations that can pick you up if you get within 70 miles of England and they'll get a cut on you and locate you within a 2 mile triangle, and give you the course's miles to your base. And he said "Well, well he's still going down, he's getting near the water, I believe he's going to ditch" and it was cold, boy, it was cold weather and then Colgate said, "I think I heard him say he's ditching. So I told my wingman "get another good count on our position, I'm right over him", so he got another count and they got it pinned and sure enough he bellied right on in trying to land in a trough but he got hit by a big spilling wave and that messed things up and then the airplane settled in and the dinghies were thrown out and everybody came out of the airplane but that water was so cold. They had one big dinghy, a 10-man dinghy and three or four of them were hanging on to that but they'd try to get in and then they'd slide off. They had two other smaller dinghies and I

sat there and watched those nine men, I just circled them, almost spun myself in. I'm just sitting there saying, "oh, no." I wanted to help them and it was just a terrible thing to just watch nine men expire like that! That was another bad feeling. We were less than 20 miles from the shore and safety. I still remember that B-17 call sign "Headlock N for Nan."

Mr. Cox: So there were really no survivors?

Mr. Castle: No.

Mr. Cox: You mentioned a while ago you had 32 years of service in the Air Force?

Mr. Castle: Yes, I didn't stay on active duty; I got out after the war to get an education. I got recalled in the Korea War in early 1951. After VE and VJ Days while serving in the Occupational Air Force ion Germany flying P-51s with the 354 "Pioneer" Group led by Cols. Glenn Eggleston and Jack Bradley at Herzogenaurach, near Erlangen, Northwest of Nuremburg, Germany. My time overseas came to a close and I went through camp "Top Hat" at Antwerp Germany and boarded the Queen Mary at Southampton, England and returned to the States through New York Port—then staged through Camp Kilmer and they put us on a troop train all the way from New Jersey through the Ohio Valley on down to Mississippi into Arkansas and into Texas, ending up in Fort Sam Houston where I was released to back to civilian life in April 1946 and was assigned to Active Air Reserve to fly P-51s again. I forgot one thing

chronologically; I stayed overseas in the E.T.O. I had enough points to come home when the war was over but I wanted to go see and try to understand the Germans. I wanted to know how and why everything got out of hand like it did. It was the most beautiful country I'd ever seen I often flew quite low across the countryside to get away from the flak and ground fire over the country. I never saw a piece of paper or piece of waste anywhere in those forests and fields--I wanted to go over there so I said I would like to transfer. After we found out the A bomb had been dropped on Japan, we stopped our training, stopped firing of rockets, and then found out the group was not going to Japan. I volunteered to go to the 9 AF as they were setting up for the Occupational Air Force of Germany. I was assigned to a Fighter Group - 354 "Pioneer" "Mustang" Fighter Group at a well-known Luftwaffe Fighter Air Field at Herzogenaurach NHW of Nuremburg.

Mr. Cox: Almost the whole alphabet there.

Mr. Castle: What a name—14 letters—Herzogenaurach! That was an old, well-known Luftwaffe Fighter base. That is where I learned to fly the ME-109 and the FWS-190; we had them there. Then we flew them around the area until the 9 AF "Wheels", heard that we had those airplanes. We fixed them up and marked the dials off, stall and landing speeds.

Mr. Cox: How did they respond compared to the planes you'd been flying in the U.S.?

Mr. Castle: Oh, I can see where with some experience the ME-109 was one fine airplane. Only trouble is the canopy must have weighed 50 pounds, and when you're taxiing, you had to hold that thing up with your right hand and arm, work the throttle, and steer the A/C. It had bullet-proof glass, flat-sided and a flat front wind screen. The whole thing raised up and was so heavy you had a hard time taxiing and working that; but I enjoyed flying it. We didn't get to fly much—the high brass came down and took them over to fly and soon tore them al up trying to fly them. We were flying every day, and they didn't. "A Lieutenant can always outfly a desk type!" Soon every airplane was out of commission. We only had three 190s and two 190s. The FW 190 was a fine airplane. Boy, that was a good airplane, and it was competitive with the P-47 and the Mustang in climb and speed.

Mr. Cox: How was the flying performance?

Mr. Castle: Just good, they could climb, and they could accelerate—but not like the P-51 or P-47 in a dive. We could out-turn the ME-109 and usually the F-1, it all depended on the type of pilot.

Mr. Cox: If you had the opportunity to fly one of those prior to going into combat would you have sensed that flying the US P-47, P-51 would be better? Do you think it would have made any difference in your feeling or your ability to perform well?

Mr. Castle: No--I would rather have that P-47--it was a fine airplane. Could take a tremendous beating. I've seen them just shot to

pieces, and you wonder how they get back. It could out-turn any fighter when they put that big paddle prop on; it absorbed the power of the 2000 hp engine better than ever. It just depended on the pilot to get the "MAX" from a given A/C.

Mr. Cox: How many years did you stay over in Germany during this time?

Mr. Castle: I joined the 354th "Pioneer Mustang" Fighter Group in the 9th AF on 15 April '45, and I stayed there until late April of '46 when they said my time was up and I had to rotate home. I went through Camp "Tophat" near Antwerp, Belgium and traveled by "Victory" Ship to England, South Hampton and crossed the Atlantic one more time on the Queen Mary to New York. I went by rail to Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, was discharged on 21 April 1946, but they said, "Do you want to join the Air Reserve?" and I said, "Yes." I stayed in the Active Air and flew more than I ever would have if I'd been on active duty. I was flying jet fighters when I was attending the University of Texas in 1947-`1951 and the 27th Wing had transferred from Kearney, Nebraska with the "Twin Mutant" P-82E airplane. I flew the "Twin Mustang" and was assigned to an "M" Day slot. I ran into Colonel Don Blakeslee who commanded and led one of the hottest outfits over there—the 4th Fighter Group, 8 AF and I had known him then. I was assigned to his 523 Fighter Squadron at Bergstrom AFB, Austin, TX.

Mr. Cox: You said you were in the Air Reserve--now was that full-time time or what?

Mr. Castle: The Active Air Reserve was almost a full-time job. We trained every weekend out at Bergstrom, near Austin. Flying AT-6s, AT-11s, P-82s and T-33s and F-84e's. I was going to school to get my degree in architecture and I don't know how I found time to go out there and fly every week but I did. So Blakesley was there and he said. "Castle, what are you doing here?" I said. "I want to fly the P-82 Twin Mustang." He replied, "Well, you ought to be able to fly it from what I know about you." They put me in the right seat and I was eventually checked out in the P-82 as P.I.C. from the left seat. I flew it for several hours, then checked out in the Y-33 and F-84 Jet Fighter. I was recalled to Active Duty in May, '51 after the Korean War got started and flew combat with the 27 Fighter Wing and 12 Fighter Wing in Korea and Japan. We ole propeller fighter pilots came back and I went to Turner Air Force Base and had no trouble converting to the pure Jet A/C—you just had to anticipate and plan ahead. At Turner, Col. Cy Wilson and I helped put another wing—the 12th Wing—together and transfer it to Bergstrom, Texas. Then I went back to Korea and Japan with the 12 Fighter—Bomber Wing and flew under the 5 AF Operation Command in FEAF.

Mr. Cox: Which jets were you flying at that time?

Mr. Castle: We were flying F84-Es and then we got the Gs with in-flight refueling capability. We also pioneered the new telescoping boon in-flight fueling with the boom receptacle in the left wing, and we could open it with switches in the cockpit for

refueling with the Boeing KC-95 (the old Boeing) and later the Boeing KC-135.

Mr. Cox: 135s?

Mr. Castle: No, the older one, the Boeing Prop plane KC-97. That was our first in-flight refueling tanker and we had to get to it to go "down hill" for us to hook up with its flying boom. We started out too high trying to learn how to do this and we kept falling off, couldn't hook up to him because he was going too slow so we said, "Well we're doing this all wrong, let's get down to a lower altitude, say 20,000 feet and we'd tell him to go downhill. He'd dive slightly and then we'd hook up to him, around 18 to 20,000' altitude and that worked out much better good.

Mr. Cox: How long did it take you to do that refueling?

Mr. Castle: Oh--we could get our fuel in less than two minutes, about two minutes, tip tanks only, and 2.7 minutes with belly drop tanks. Our main problem was to avoid strong gusty winds which would cause a disconnect and a second hook-up.

Mr. Cox: Was that particular re-fueling a hose type with a funnel on it?

Mr. Castle: We USAF Test Section selected the telescoping flying boon and re, receptacle in the refueling A/C. We decided against the RAF probe and drogue system with a funnel on it. We tried it

but we were chasing our funnels and they were solid and if you get up close to it, your pressure wave pushes the funnel away. You're building up an air pressure out there that pushes the funnel away and you just keep chasing it and you never get hooked up. What you had to do was come up to it the very first moment you saw it wiggle, go full power, and jab it in--then you were hooked up. This was all developed with the F-84 and F-86 utilizing the KC-97 and later the K-135.

Mr. Cox: I think the KC-135 was a jet, wasn't it? I'm not sure.

Mr. Castle: Yes, that's what we used later, but what we had at first was the prop driven KC-97.

Mr. Cox: I think the 135 was a jet wasn't it? I'm not sure.

Mr. Castle: Yes, that's what we used later, but what we had at first was the prop driven KC-97.

Mr. Cox: How many months did you spend in Korea?

Mr. Castle: We went to Itazuki, Japan and then we were stationed at Misawa and we operated out of K14, Taegu, South Korea. We flew dive bombing missions, ground support and strafing. I was also doing some special tests on the new C-1 gun sight and didn't fly a lot of the regular missions. I was on special test missions, but I got several regular

missions in. I think I did 31 or 32 missions. I believe I was in Korea for about 3-1/2 months.

Mr. Cox: Were you flying out of Japan?

Mr. Castle: Some were out of Japan—some were out of Korea.

Mr. Cox: How far north did you give support?

Mr. Castle: We went nearly up to the Yalu River, 38th Parallel. We were destroying targets up in the northwest and north areas mostly in the Antung and Sinuiju areas NW corner of Korea along the Yalu River.

Mr. Cox: Were you involved in support in some of the retreats that came out of that area?

Mr. Castle: After the Inchon landing and subsequent drives northward. To push the Communists back across the 36 parallel.

Mr. Cox: Well, Inchon was the invasion but did you give any support? They did cross the Yalu when the Chinese entered the war.

Mr. Castle: Yes, we provided interdiction attacks to stop the enemy's supply. Many types of aircraft used were the T-6 Spotter Mosquito, B-26, P-51 and P-8. We came in long after the initial Inchon attack by MacArthur. We gave low level tactical

support to the 8th Army as it moved back northward from the Pusan Perimeter back up the Yalu. It was hard to locate the Communists' Chinese supply routes though we knew their general routes. Most of our missions were dive-bombing.

Mr. Cox: So when the Korean War was over, you returned to the United States?

Mr. Castle: Our wing came back to the United States before the Korean War was over. The time now came that I had to decide if I was going to pursue my career as an architect or stay on active duty and accept a regular commission. If I was to succeed as an architect, it was time to "get going." As much as I loved flying fighters, I made the decision to come off active duty—stay in the active air reserve—and pursue my architecture career.

Mr. Cox: Mentally, I had tried to put 32 years on your entry date so when you got out of the Reserve, what year was that roughly?

Mr. Castle: Out of the Air Reserve?

Mr. Cox: Yes, sir.

Mr. Castle: Well, I got out of the Air Reserve when I was retired 27 August 1975.

I was in the Service as listed:

1. WW II for 4 years and 3 months
2. Active Air Reserves for 4 years and 11 months
3. Korean War for 2 years and 4 months
4. Active Air Reserve for 21 years, 2 months, adding up to a total of: 32 years and 8 months, nearly 33 years service, (of which nearly 11 years were active duty) I always say I was in for 32 years, retired as Wing Commander, Colonel, at Ellington AFB, Houston, TX on 27 August 1975.

Mr. Cox: I gather by the way you're telling me your experiences that you thoroughly enjoyed your Air Force career.

Mr. Castle: Well, we had some rough times there in the 2 wars. I served as a significant member of a world event project--Operation "Ivy" **when** we made the first Hydro bomb airdrop at Eniowetok and Bikini Atoll. We operated out squadron of "Sniffer" F-84 Thunder Jets out of Kawajalein Island of the Marshall Islands, south mid-Pacific. We were a joint task force 123.4.2 out of HQTS Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii Islands, Atomic Energy Commission.

Mr. Cox: You were involved in that?

Mr. Castle: Yes, in April '52, the AEC, Navy, Army and Air Force formed a composite, special, top secret squadron of heavy experienced fighter pilots, We had the only airplane with in-flight refueling long-range, high altitude capability, and they said that's the type of airplane we need to track the cloud and get all of our technical test and data out of it.

Mr. Cox: Which island were you flying out of at that time?

Mr. Castle: Kawajalein. They had a Navy Air Station and strip there and we had to take off on these missions using JATO on the take-offs out over shark infested waters. I flew on the airdrop test airburst of the first hydrogen bomb weapon. We took off in flights of two with JATO and monitored different quadrants of the drop area downwind. I was in orbit at 42,000' MSL 25 miles off of zero. We had a special modified airplane, we wore special lead suits, heavy lead suits; we had special instrumentation to tell how much radiation we were taking, accumulative doses and all of the other required data recordings. One instrument would warn us of maximum dosage received, get out and return to base. We had 2 tanks on our wingtips, especially designed for sampling residue in the bomb cloud. We would sample as long as we could; then, when we got our maximum accumulated dosage, we would have to leave and return to base. We'd be so far out, however, we would have to find our tankers and refuel—we had additional fuel in two belly drop tanks. It was hard to find the tankers out there because we had big cumulus build-ups; and I had only 300 pounds of fuel--I had to go in quick. I told him, "let's ignore the safety procedures; the minute I got a green light in here, I'm going to say—go with the fuel—I don't have a second to spare. I have to get a green light and he has to get a green light. The minute I get my green light, turn it on!" I drove up to the boom, made a record-breaking hookup for fuel—God bless that boom operator!

Mr. Cox: Three hundred pounds would give you about how many minutes?

Mr. Castle: Nothing, I was going to run out in seconds, very soon, and boy, did I make quick hook-up. I said, this is going to be for real because I'm going to drop off and splash if you don't get me right now. He said, "We got you, we got you Chief." I hooked on, got my green light, and I said, "Go Man", and he started pumping. Life was good!

Mr. Cox: How many flights did you make like that on atomic tests?

Mr. Castle: Two--two flights. The first one was a practice flight; the second was for the real thing. Once you had received a dose of radiation within the safe dosage and time, you were not allowed to fly again.

Mr. Cox: Did you pick up a lot of radiation?

Mr. Castle: Well, I do not think I got a full dosage, but I got good results. My samples were real good. You see--we didn't have fuel in our tip tanks; that was a special tip tank that was modified with a hole in the front of it that collected the bomb fall-out residue. We had nuclear instruments inside the pressurized cockpit, and I made sure I had that lead suit on with a good, close fit, although it was very awkward to fly in it. Let's go back to the drop countdown for the air drop burst. I could hear the countdown going and I knew it was

about to go so I pulled down my (almost a black tinted visor), a special visor AEC gave us. I turned around and looked in the opposite direction--the whole 360 degrees all around me was bright daylight—a great bright light, (all quadrants around me). I said, "Well, it's no use looking off here now. I looked back and there in seconds rises a big cloud—gray and dark--and it keeps ascending rapidly. I can see the damnest bunch of bright green, blues, reds and yellow fires flashing inside that cloud that was tumbling upward, going up so fast it didn't take long to get to my level. I'm at 42,000'--it's still going. I told my wingman that it was going to altitudes we couldn't' reach.

Mr. Cox: Was it an A bomb or an H-bomb?

Mr. Castle: The "H" bomb, Hydrogen bomb--we really didn't know what the yield was going to be on that thing. The scientific nuclear experts had said they though they had the yield estimated within acceptable limits—but after intense questioning by leery pilots, they admitted they were not absolutely sure of the total yield.

Mr. Cox: What were your emotions in relation to that admission?

Mr. Castle: I really didn't particularly want to go on that project but we were selected and theoretically we volunteered. It's a national thing for the good of the country and it's our duty. Let's Go.

Mr. Cox: And do you ever have anything you might think of as negative health problems due to this test?

Mr. Castle: Well—we don't know—maybe. There were 28 of us that were in that experiment. We've lost several—I believe we've lost 8 of us to leukemia and most of the guys were in excellent health. I said, well, I think this group should be checked-up on and followed through to ascertain the reason for death as they pass on. Most of us are approaching 80 years of age within the next 2-3 years. I asked the medical staff at Wilford Hall, the fine USAF Hospital at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, TX, if they knew whether the Air Force has been keeping any follow-up records, but they had no information on that project.

Mr. Cox: How are you treated when you go to the hospitals? I'm assuming you go to the VA hospitals or AF hospitals.

Mr. Castle: I had high blood pressure that's been hard to control but it is now under control and has been since 1971. Once you get on the FFA's list, it is difficult to get a flying medical certificate. I flew many hours with the Reserve prior to this problem and finally retired at Ellington AFB 27 August 1975.

Mr. Cox: What was your rank when you retired?

Mr. Castle: Full Colonel as a Wing Commander. It's been a good ride.

Mr. Cox: I also heard you mention that you fly with the Confederate Air Force.

Mr. Castle: Yes, that's where I'm doing a lot of my instruction and check piloting for air show flying and teaching formation flying—traveling all over the nation the year-round attending on the average some 22 to 28 air shows, formation flying clinics, demonstrations, etc.

Mr. Cox: Are you flying out of Abilene?

Mr. Castle: Yes, we have a CAF Squadron and an EAA Warbird SQD 5 at Abilene Airport. I make myself available to whomever and whenever. We hold clinics for formation flying and guys from all over America come in and we do our instruction and put them through this course. We also host and provide the EAA SWRFI, Southwest Regional Fly-In annually at Abilene Regional Airport. Our Squadron has 7 members with WW II AT-6s and 3 BT-13s.

Mr. Cox: Occasionally--they bring vintage aircraft in here that are military. The Confederate Air Force brought in a P-47 among other planes a year or so ago. Were you in or around that aircraft at that time?

Mr. Castle: Yes, I have been invited to fly in all the Nimitz Museum's recent fly-bys in the nineties and flew an AT-6 in the one you mentioned. We went out early that morning and I rode in the TBMs, the Flight Leader. I checked the pilot out for formation

flying previous to the fly-by. Then I came back in--got an AT-6 and flew in the fly-over. We all really enjoyed that experience in 2001.

Mr. Cox: Now, I can look back and say, "Gee, I know someone who was involved in that fly-by."

Mr. Castle: Yes, I flew in al the Fly-bys in the nineties.

Mr. Cox: You did? Well, I'm going to change the subject a little bit and I'm going to ask when you attended the School of Architecture at the University of Texas and when you received your degree.

Mr. Castle: Yes-I graduated from the School of Architecture at U.T. in May—Class of 1951 just before being recalled to active duty with the USAF and the Korean War.

Mr. Cox: And so while---------?

Mr. Castle: I had to do it in a hurry, I had to get a job, I did a 5-year architectural course, I did a 5-year architectural course in 3-1/2 years, always going to summer school during the regular semesters when I was recalled. I was actually glad to get away from the scholarly grind and do some real operational fighter flying. It's relaxing.

Mr. Cox: But you worked a number of years as an architect?

Mr. Castle: Yes—after I got off active duty when the Korean War was over.

Mr. Cox: In what cities did you work?

Mr. Castle: I worked in Austin, TX--Abilene, a little while—back to Austin, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York and Houston. While working in Austin in 1955, I got an offer from American Airlines to join them as an Assistant Director of Properties and Regional Architect. The airlines had three regions at that time--the east coast region, central region and the west coast region. They trained me in Dallas to be an Assistant Director of Properties. I worked for Burk Smith, C.R. Smith's little brother. Burk was out on the west coast. This was a very interesting job, and what made it so interesting was the year—1955. This was the year when the airlines made a transition from props to pure jets, turbine jets. That changed the way the entire commercial airline business conducted operations. This changed everything—they handled baggage in a different way. You had to load a lot of baggage on the plane quickly and not lose it. You handled your reservations differently--we redesigned the reservations offices and centers, and we were just going to computers big time. Our biggest problem was designing a baggage system that would work because we were becoming mechanized. We had to design and take care of the noise; and we spent a lot of time designing blast barriers, especially at Love Field—people were complaining all the time. I rode on the second flight of a

707 when it took off. This was a great performing jet transport—a pacesetter for the tremendously rapidly growing airline industry with new scientific computerized equipment—a great place to be!

Mr. Cox: Did you ever get to operate the controls as s pilot or co-pilot?

Mr. Castle: Yes--I went up front on a few occasions—the crew knew I was an ole WW II fighter pilot. The pilot said, "Look at that cup of coffee sitting over there." He had a coffee cup sitting on the ledge, and there wasn't a ripple on it. "You talk like a Boeing guy," "I said; and he admitted he was. I also flew on the first Convair, the 4-engine turbo jet, not the old Convair. This was out of Lockheed at Burbank, CA. American Airlines was going to buy it, but they decided not to. I believe I have had a wonderful, exciting, interesting life—it's great to be a part of future aviation.

Mr. Cox: Yes, I can see that.

Mr. Castle: I was a member of the National Airline Technician Committee and helped design the first flexible telescoping loading bridge and I worked with the engineers of Pacific Iron and Steel where you construct and test the bridges. We had changed the way you handle passengers into a satellite terminal building and loaded them onto the jet. We changed the way you collect your passengers, how you do your ticketing, how you load the baggage--and I helped with all of this. I was on the

committee that was responsible for these new methods; I coordinated with Pierra and Luckman from Los Angeles and we designed the new LAX Airport. I not only was on the design committee but I also served on the National Airline Technical Committee. We were researching all new concepts for the new jet age aviation. The most difficult and challenging problem was how to handle the baggage in a much shorter time. We put the first loading gate up at the San Francisco International Airport.

Mr. Cox: Loading gate?

Mr. Castle: Flexible--they telescope out to the airplane, wheel it around laterally and roll it back in or out for the passengers to plane or deplane. That's the beginning of the satellite terminal buildings. If you build your main building as you go in and then we couldn't park enough jets around that building, so we put these long projections out and placed a satellite waiting area on the end. Then you could park four or five jets around that. That was an exciting, challenging time in commercial aviation in the 50's and 60's.

Mr. Cox: I would think so--yes.

Mr. Castle: The fuel systems changed—flight training and operations changed; so we were really busy. I was transferred to the AAL western region at Los Angeles in 1957. American trained me in Dallas—then transferred me out to their region, which didn't have an architect or a regional assistant to V.P. Burk Smith.

Smith handled community affairs and properties. We traveled all over the region constantly. I worked with him and we would go to all the different places and study and analyze our problems at each airport that American flew into. That way we could see what we had to do for the next 5-10 years. We knew all the Port Authority people, all the mayors, and everybody else. My region started with our main office, operating out of LAX up to San Francisco, Seattle, WA, down to Tucson and Douglas, AZ, Las Vegas, NV and down to San Diego. I spent al lot of my time traveling to all these cities throughout the month. I sat down with the managers and found out what their problems were, then put together a proposed solution with cost estimates on it, went back to the office and we'd look at it there in that regional office. If approved, then I would fly to New York and take the package to the Board of Directors for approval. If we recommended construction, we had to have our "ducks in a row," and we had to know the cost and the applicability to the future growth as anticipated.

Mr. Cox: Yes.

Mr. Castle: This was very interesting and I was flying in Air Reserve all this time.

Mr. Cox: What was the final aircraft that you flew in the Reserve?

Mr. Castle: I flew the F-101 and F-102 and checked out in them, but was involved with planning and training that was required to keep our fighter guys up to speed and combat ready.

Mr. Cox: F-101 was the oval snout?

Mr. Castle: Yes, the F-101 was, but I flew the F-102 first. That is the big 2-seater and was called the "Voodoo." The F-101 was the "Delta Dagger."

Mr. Cox: I'm going to change the subject now. This is all very interesting but we've missed out on some important information--I'm assuming you have married and have a family?

Mr. Castle: Yes—I'm married and have one daughter and I helped raise two daughters from a second marriage. My present wife, Vonnie, is a wonderful companion.

Mr. Cox: When did you get married--when you came back from Europe?

Mr. Castle: I got married in 1949 while I was at the University of Texas.

Mr. Cox: You said you had three daughters?

Mr. Castle: One daughter and two stepdaughters. They are all grown and all doing very well and that is a blessing for all.

Mr. Cox: They're proud of their father. Are there some grandchildren?

Mr. Castle: Yes Mina Jo and Bob Dosher have a son, Max; they live northeast of Albuquerque. Susan von Rosenburg and her husband

have three daughters and a son and live in Austin, TX. They are all busy getting an education and their futures look great.

Mr. Cox: I imagine your children/grandchildren ask you questions.

Mr. Castle: Oh yes—they have wanted to know and I have been very communicative on war stories. Will von Rosenburg, the youngest, has airplanes on his mind so I'll have to watch him and see where he's headed—as we say, "Aim High."

Mr. Cox: Okay, now, that's one of the purposes of this transcript--to get to know you. I think your family would, hopefully, like to know all the experiences you have had. We've brought out some points you enjoyed talking about. Some of them you have probably not discussed thoroughly before in sequence. I hope we have at least. If there's anything else—please comment.

Mr. Castle: Yes, I tell you it's a wonderful thing to do and we are all highly appreciative of this opportunity offered to us to tell people about our war experiences so they know what it was really like. I know guys who can't even talk about it--a lot of them just won't.

Mr. Cox: You mean the pilots in combat?

Mr. Castle: Yes - I've learned to live with it somehow--I don't know why, but it never really got to me. I watched a man taxi out ahead

of me to take off on a mission deep into Germany. He pulled out on the runway; he was having a little trouble, and just stopped--sat there--and didn't take off. He finally said, "I'm going back," turned around and taxied off onto the grass. The airdrome officer of the day came out, took him back to headquarters; and we saw very little of him after that.

Mr. Cox: I try not to ask questions that people don't want to answer; but I think they're important if you want to talk about it. Most times you can sense if the individual wants to pursue it. Is there anything else in your career, now that you've retired, that you pursue—like a hobby—I know you're still doing some flying.

Mr. Castle: Well, I like to fish, hunt and enjoy watching air and auto racing. I'm a great fan of Dale Ernhardt-—he would have made a great fighter pilot--but bless his heart, he's gone now.

Mr. Cox: A special breed of people.

Mr. Castle: I always thought he was special. I wrote him a note and told him I wished I had a few guys like him to fly with whom had the guts and the determination that he had. We would have had a great fighter squadron—"Dale-You would have made a great fighter pilot!"

Mr. Cox: And he probably had no desire to do so.

Mr. Castle: That's true—because he had no war to fight. I tell you what--I've gotten involved in this airshow business because when you take a war bird to an airshow, you stay with the airplane until 5 or 6 o'clock. These young children come out--they're all ages-- and some of them know more about the airplane than we do. We WW II pilots grew up in the cockpit of a fighter, bomber, transport, fighting for our lives as very young men. We have a story to tell. You'd be surprised how kids today read up on these things. One little guy came up to me when I had my AT-6 there. I used to be part owner of a P-51 but it got so expensive I had to let it go. Anyway, my good buddy is in his P-51 so we're sitting there jawing with each other when this kid, (bright-eyed and smart) comes up to us and says, "A Mustang--Hey". H wanted to know all about it and we sit there when Jerry says to me, "Well, let's tell him about this airplane." We started telling him about it and pretty soon, he corrects one of us on something. He says, "Well, wasn't it this or that?" I forgot now what we were talking about. Jerry looks at me and says, "You know, you're right kid—I just fly this thing, work on it, and pay the bills—what do I know?" I said, "Man, he knows more about this airplane than we do," and we had a good laugh. The boy says, "I read a lot about airplanes, but I can't fly them."

Mr. Cox: You know when they have an air show and thousands of people come out with the children to watch it, I bet it's a real treat, a thrill and a learning experience.

Mr. Castle: Our motto among the warbird pilots is, "Don't ever walk away from a child. Pay attention to him, because he is our heritage. They come up to us wide-eyed and want to know everything about that airplane and when and how we flew it. They are not taught much about WW II in the public schools today—the liberal visionists have distorted the facts and truths.

Mr. Cox: Many of those children probably will probably become affiliated with aviation and the many related industries in some way or another during their lifetime as citizens.

Mr. Castle: Hopefully, we tell them all about the defense of America against her enemies of freedom. This young fellow must have been 10 or 11 years old. He had a book with him and he wanted to ask me about a couple of things in the book so we opened it up and I said, "Let me see that." It was a new history book. I turned one page, turned another, and there's a new subject on each page. It had only two pages on World War II in a history book that big. I said, "Is this all there is in here?" I couldn't believe it! No wonder people don't have the same feeling and e cohesiveness that we had as a nation. As far as I'm concerned, all the heroes are still over there. We survivors were just doing our job for our country in a time of war and aggression against all free people of the world.

Mr. Cox: I would have to agree with that.

Mr. Castle: None of us feel like heroes--not even the guys that were in combat. Colonel Don Blakeslee, a great 8 AF Combat Leader, and a good friend of mine said, "Hell, we all just did our job--we killed Germans—the enemy."

Mr. Cox: I think the emotions of most people I have talked to feel the same way. They had a mission, and they knew what they had to do.

Mr. Castle: We all knew what it was about, and the main thing is the country was cognizant of this. Everybody knew, okay, America is in the war and everybody pulled together. It didn't matter whether you were in the military or a civilian; I bet if we had to mobilize in a hurry, you couldn't get the people to come together like that. So soon—there is so much dissention. Many have forgotten God; morals have declined among many people. I do believe, however, that we still would have the strength of our forefathers and will defend our country with pride. If we do not have the will to fight for our freedom, we will lose it. Freedom is not free for nothing, it has a price.

Mr. Cox: I think so.

Mr. Castle: The young people have not been taught the truth; they have had a lot of things rammed down them that should have never been put that way by the new liberals in our education organizations and schools. It is getting better; it will continue to get better; I still have faith it will get better.

We must keep education controlled at our local community levels; parents know what's best for education—not the politicians in our federal government.

Mr. Cox: On behalf of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Mr. Castle, I would like to thank you and show our appreciation,

Mr. Castle: It's an honor to be here at your great museum in Fredericksburg, Texas. I was proud to have been invited.

Mr. Cox: Personally, I think all of you are heroes who did what you had to do and I appreciate that very much. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Castle: Thanks, Bill, and best wishes for your work with The National Museum of the Pacific War (previously the Admiral Nimitz Museum). May America never forget that our freedom must be defended and we will have to fight for our freedom—always! Yours in service and duty, Hank Castle.

-End of tape-

Final transcribed by
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