

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

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Lt Col (Ret) Al Flocke

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(B-24 Navigator – Pacific Theater)**

This is Chuck Nichols. We are sitting in the Conference Room of the George Bush Gallery of the Pacific War. It is October 22, 2000. I'm sitting here with Mr. Al Flocke, who was a B-24 navigator during World War II. He is going to provide us with some of his recollections from the war.

Mr. Nichols: Col Flocke would you tell us where you were born.

Lt Col Flocke: I was born on July 28, 1921, Schulenburg, Texas.

Mr. Nichols: Were your parents from Schulenburg, or were they immigrants?

Lt Col Flocke: No, their parents were. I am a second generation American.

Mr. Nichols: I see. What did they do in Schulenburg? Your parents.

Lt Col Flocke: My Mother was a housewife. My Dad was the Plant Superintendent of the GE Ruhmann Manufacturing Company.

Mr. Nichols: I see. Did you have siblings?

Lt Col Flocke: No, I am an only child.

Mr. Nichols: You are an only child. OK. You attended the schools in Schulenburg?

Lt Col Flocke: High-school. That's right.

Mr. Nichols: Were you recently graduated from high-school, or were you still in high-school when World War II began?

Lt Col Flocke: I had graduated from high-school in 1938, and I was at Texas A&M University at that time.

Mr. Nichols: I see. An Aggie.

Lt Col Flocke: An Aggie at the time the war broke out.

Mr. Nichols: You were at A&M on December 7, 1941?

Lt Col Flocke: That is correct.

Mr. Nichols: What were your impressions when you heard about the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor?

Lt Col Flocke: We stayed up all night long and listened to the radio as the reports started coming in. There was no sleep that night. We knew we were going to have to go soon and we were all very interested. I was in the Infantry at A&M and I got to thinking about that. I said, “you know I don’t want to be sleeping out here in the mud and all that kind of stuff, so I’m going to try for the Air Corps.” So I enlisted in the Air Corps before I graduated from A&M. So that is how I got in the Air Corps.

Mr. Nichols: But you were in the Corps of Cadets then?

Lt Col Flocke: I was in the Cadet Corps.

Mr. Nichols: You didn’t receive a commission.

Lt Col Flocke: No I did not receive a commission.

Mr. Nichols: You went through Aviation Cadets?

Lt Col Flocke: Right. I went through Aviation Cadets.

Mr. Nichols: Where did you begin your training?

Lt Col Flocke: Santa Ana, California.

Mr. Nichols: Santa Ana, California.

Lt Col Flocke: I enlisted in San Antonio. I took the cadet exam there and then I went to Santa Ana, California.

Mr. Nichols: How old were you at the time?

Lt Col Flocke: Twenty-one. It was 1942.

Mr. Nichols: And you were not married at the time?

Lt Col Flocke: No. I was not.

Mr. Nichols: Did you have a sweetheart?

Lt Col Flocke: More or less.

Mr. Nichols: More or less.

Lt Col Flocke: I'll say several.

Mr. Nichols: Several sweethearts. OK, I think the Corps of Cadets had probably several sweethearts.

Lt Col Flocke: That is true.

Mr. Nichols: What were the conditions like when you got out to California to begin your training. What were your living conditions and so on and so forth out there?

Lt Col Flocke: Well, they were good. It was very intensive training. We, of course, marched everywhere and had parades and all that kind of thing. Of course I was accustomed to that from A&M. In fact, they made me the Squadron First Sergeant because I could yell out orders. Conditions were good. We lived in barracks.

Mr. Nichols: Pretty rigid discipline out there?

Lt Col Flocke: Oh yes.

Mr. Nichols: White glove inspections and working tours.

Lt Col Flocke: Yes. Oh you bet.

Mr. Nichols: What kind of aircraft did you start your training in?

Lt Col Flocke: Well from Santa Ana I went to Advanced Navigation School at Mather, Sacramento, California. We had AT-18's, which were Lockheed-Hudsons.

Mr. Nichols: How long did your training last at Mather?

Lt Col Flocke: Seems like it was about four months. Something like that. Every program that I got into was always accelerated because they were needing bodies.

Mr. Nichols: You didn't start out in Pilot Training and then convert to Navigation?

Lt Col Flocke: No. Everybody wants to be a pilot. I was eliminated because I wore glasses.

Mr. Nichols: I see. Where did you go from Mather.

Lt Col Flocke: From Mather I went to what they called Phase Training at Gowan Field at Boise, Idaho. That is where the crew is made up and we trained in the B-24. There were three phases. The first is the pilot training where they shoot landings and all that stuff. The second is the bombardier training where you get up and you fly circles and circles dropping practice bombs. The third is the navigator training where you take long cross-countries.

Mr. Nichols: What all did your Navigator training entail?

Lt Col Flocke: Celestial navigation.

Mr. Nichols: Celestial navigation.

Lt Col Flocke: Well of course it was dead reckoning. That is the basis of all navigation. Celestial navigation, which I used extensively in the Pacific because there were no radio stations out there, and weather and everything that goes with it.

Mr. Nichols: After you completed your training here in the States, where did you head out to?

Lt Col Flocke: I was training with a group to be sent to the ETO and they pulled three crews out of there. Now the only thing that the three crews that were pulled out had in common, they were looking for a common denominator, was that the pilots had just made First Lieutenant. We were all Second Lieutenants. Our pilots just made First Lieutenant and so they pulled us out of there before we had completed our training really. They sent us to Hamilton in California and there we picked up a brand new B-24 and flew what we called fuel consumption up and down the San Joaquin Valley. We landed at Fairfield Suisun, which was later Travis and waited for orders to go overseas. We didn't know where. When we got our orders we had instructions, they were Top Secret, not to open them until we were past the point of no return, which we did. Now a little sidelight about that. I've said many times. See I stayed in the Air Force. I'm retired Air Force. I was in the KC-135 later. But comparing the training that we got later and now with

what we got during World War II it is a wonder as many of us got back as we did.

Mr. Nichols: I know they were in a hurry to get you into combat so your training must have been rather minimal.

Lt Col Flocke: We always flew the Pacific at night so we could do celestial navigation. We were scheduled to take off about 9 o'clock at night. We were in the briefing room and my pilot got me off in the corner and he said, "Al you think you can get us over here." I said, "Well Tucker, I've never flown a leg this long before, but I'm confident that I can do it." I said, "How about you?" He said, "I've never taken off a B-24 this heavy before." But he said, "I think I can do it." I said, "OK, you get us off the ground and I'll get you over there."

Mr. Nichols: So you headed out 2500-3000 miles across nothing but ocean.

Lt Col Flocke: Ocean, ocean, ocean, that's right. Landed at Hickam.

Mr. Nichols: Were you stationed at Hickam for a while then?

Lt Col Flocke: Well, we went to Gunnery School at Hickam and we flew anti-submarine patrol out of there. Actually we were stationed at Kahuka Point, which is on the north part of the Island. Most of our time was actually spent at Hickam.

Mr. Nichols: I suppose your crew was probably as young as you were.

Lt Col Flocke: Oh yes. Some of our enlisted men were 19 years old.

Mr. Nichols: That would be your Radio Operator

Lt Col Flocke: Yes, they were young. I think our Bombardier was the oldest guy

on the crew. I was 22, turned 23. I think he was 25 and that was old.

Mr. Nichols: Where did you go from Hickam?

Lt Col Flocke: Well, we went to Kwajalein. We landed at Kwajalein and it had just been secured. I remember how barren it was. It had been an island covered with palm trees and they were gone, just blasted away. They were still digging big trenches and shoving hundreds of Japanese dead into these trenches and covering them up when we landed there.

Mr. Nichols: Were you still flying anti-submarine patrols out of Kwajalein?

Lt Col Flocke: Oh no. These were combat missions. That is when the “playing” stopped and the work started.

Mr. Nichols: Were you flying high altitude missions?

Lt Col Flocke: Well, they were all long flights. Our missions ran 12-14 hours and what we would do is at the beginning we bombed Wake Island, we bombed Joliet, we bombed Moji. Our main bombing was to bomb Truk, which was the Japanese Pearl Harbor. What we did there, Kwajalein was Army controlled and Enewetak was Navy controlled island and it was 300 miles closer to the target than we were. So we would take off from Kwajalein, land at Enewetak. They would top our tanks, and sometimes we would spend the night there. Sometimes we keep going, so we would have enough fuel to make the run. We had to get our tanks topped at Enewetak.

Mr. Nichols: When you flew these 12-14 hour missions, did they have extra internal tanks in the B-24, or did you just

Lt Col Flocke: No. Well, yes they had extra tanks, but we didn't use them. We just used the regular tanks because we had to fill up the bomb bays with bombs.

Mr. Nichols: And probably all the fuel was brought in in 55 gallon drums and had to be pumped in by hand.

Lt Col Flocke: No, we weren't that primitive. We had fuel trucks, but you asked whether they were low or high altitude. What we would do is we take off and form the formation. Well first we'd start flying single missions at night. Single sorties. And we kept them up. We had an aircraft over Truk all night long, but then we started flying daytime missions, which was scarier, and in formation. What we would do is we'd take off and form the formation and we would fly out at 8,000-9,000 feet so we wouldn't be using oxygen, be more comfortable. Then about an hour out we would start our climb to 20,000-21,000 feet, that was our bombing altitude. We'd drop our bombs, start our descent and then we'd fly back at a lower altitude.

Mr. Nichols: I suppose the aircraft were unheated? Did you have heated flying suits?

Lt Col Flocke: Fortunately in the Central Pacific we didn't need them.

Mr. Nichols: It didn't get that cold at 21,000 feet?

Lt Col Flocke: It didn't get that cold. Now we had one heated flying suit. Our Radio Operator was also the Nose Turret Operator, and we called it his bunny suit. It was a blue flannel, electric heated flying suit and he

would get in the nose turret and the Bombardier would plug him in.

But that is the only one we had.

Mr. Nichols: Did you encounter a lot of Japanese fighters along the way?

Lt Col Flocke: Not along the way. As opposed to the ETO, you see a Japanese fighter has a very, very short range. So as we would be approaching the target we could see the sun gleaming off of their canopies. I mean, they would be up there waiting for us because they had already picked us up. They knew we were coming. Then they would hit us when we were on the bomb run and stay with us for maybe 15 minutes as we were out-bound, but that is all the fuel they had so we were very fortunate that way, and we had a lot of anti-aircraft.

Mr. Nichols: Did your aircraft receive any damage from Japanese fighters or anti-aircraft?

Lt Col Flocke: Oh yeah. Well, talking about anti-aircraft, what I used to do on the bomb run is to watch our bombs as they went down, to follow them down. I would spread a flak suit down on the floor. That was my lifeline. I would crawl down under the flight deck and when the bomb bay doors opened I was sitting on a ledge about that high, and I was sitting right there and I could look out. So I was sitting on a flak suit, I wore a flak suit and I had a flak helmet on. Of course I had intercom. I was in contact. One day we were on the bomb run and I heard what sounded like big hail stones hitting the side of the ship. I looked up and there was daylight coming through the fuselage where

there wasn't before. That was where the flak got us. I said, "I'm getting out of here." Another time we had a 20 mm, a Japanese 20mm, that was above us, angled down and it hit the electric control box on top of the ball turret. The Ball Turret Gunner, the smallest guy on the crew was always the Turret Gunner, and he was in there shooting and everything, and when this thing hit we had an electrical fire in the back, which they put out, and it knocked out all of our intercom. So here's this little guy down in there, nobody could talk to him. He didn't know what was going on. He couldn't move his turret electrically because all of the power was out, and I went to the back to give him a hand and we hydraulically raised the turret and when we opened that door that was the whitest guy I ever saw.

Mr. Nichols: Those ball turrets were a little cramped.

Lt Col Flocke: Yes they were..

Mr. Nichols: The gunner had to practically roll himself into a ball to get into he? didn't

Lt Col Flocke: That is what he did.

Mr. Nichols: That is probably why they called it a ball turret.

Lt Col Flocke: Well, of course, it looked like a ball.

Mr. Nichols: They were all retractable.

Lt Col Flocke: On the B-24's they were.

Mr. Nichols: They were pretty close to the ground, so they had to be retracted.

Lt Col Flocke: That's right.

Mr. Nichols: Were any of your crewmates wounded, or did you receive any wounds?

Lt Col Flocke: No, we were fortunate. We had them wounded all around us and killed around us and shot down, but when you are young you think that is not going to happen to me. That is another guy. You remember that.

Mr. Nichols: Oh yeah. Did you have any nose art on your airplane?

Lt Col Flocke: Yes. The name of the airplane was "The Merry Boozer." Our pilot was a tea-totaler. How it got that name, the enlisted men named it. Gosh, I should have brought a picture of it.

Mr. Nichols: Yeah, you should have. We would enjoy having a picture. We have a little nose art display over in the Nimitz portion of the museum.

Lt Col Flocke: Some of the Nose Art books have the Merry Boozer in them. It showed a guy with a mess kit here and ammunition draped around his neck and all that stuff. His cap was on crooked. It was real nice.

Mr. Nichols: You didn't have one of the scantily clad girls on your airplane like a lot of them have?

Lt Col Flocke: No we didn't. As a sidelight. We stopped at the hotel there and one of the airplanes was Tarfu II was in our squadron. Well Tarfu I, I knew the pilot and the whole crew of that plane.

Mr. Nichols: On your missions were you bombing any shipping or were you strictly on the land targets?

Lt Col Flocke: At first it was land targets. Like I say, Truk was the Japanese Pearl

Harbor. We bombed them from Kwajalein and Enewetok, and then the 13th came up from the south and they bombed them. So we were bombing land targets and one interesting thing I remember was there was a big building there. It had a big red cross painted on top. Of course you are not supposed to bomb hospitals. On one of our daylight raids somebody's bombs hit that hospital and the blackest smoke you ever saw came billowing up from it. So that was a camouflage.

Mr. Nichols: A ploy like Saddam Hussein's baby food factory perhaps.

Lt Col Flocke: That's right. But then later after we moved from Kwajalein, we went to Guam right after it was taken. Then were bombing primarily Iwo Jima, but then we bombed shipping also. We were getting closer to Japan.

Mr. Nichols: To backtrack a little bit. What were the living conditions like on Kwajalein. I'm sure they weren't as good as they were back in the States during training.

Lt Col Flocke: Oh no. They weren't. When we first got there, we lived in tents. I remember we went to the squadron area and the Operations Officer told us, the officers stayed together, and enlisted men together, but he says, "That's your tent over there." We saw the name written in chalk on the flap, and we had known that he had been with us at Hickam. He left maybe a week or two ahead of us. His name Kapinski. We said, "Hey that's Kapinski's tent." Well, he went out and he never

came back, so it is your tent. We stayed in there a short period of time and then we had barracks for the officers and enlisted men too. They weren't as nice as the ones we had in the States, but they did well and we had our own squadron mess. I will say this, the food most of the time was not good, but they did the best they could with what they had and so I'll never really complain about it.

Mr. Nichols: You always read about the Spam. Did you get to dine on Spam?

Lt Col Flocke: Our mainstay was cornbeef from Australia. So we had very little Spam.

Mr. Nichols: How many aircraft did you lose out of your groups that you flew with? Was the loss rate pretty high?

Lt Col Flocke: No, it really wasn't. As again, as compared with the ETO, our loss rate was fairly low. I don't remember the numbers.

Mr. Nichols: Did you have to endure any bombing raids while you were on Kwajalein?

Lt Col Flocke: Not on Kwajalein. Now when we were on Guam, latter on, we had some air raids. We were not bombed, but we had bomb shelters and the sirens would go off in the night and you would head for the bomb shelters and usually it was just one guy flying over. I don't know what he was doing, but of course we would see him in the search lights with anti-aircraft around him and all that.

Mr. Nichols: Washing Machine Charlie, so to speak.

Lt Col Flocke: That's right. That's exactly right.

Mr. Nichols: When you got to Guam, had your living conditions improved any, or were they relatively the same as you had on Kwajalein?

Lt Col Flocke: Lodging-wise they weren't as good because we lived in tents. We arrived at Guam shortly after it was taken. It wasn't even secured because we had Japanese all around. They would conduct the Army and the Marines would just set up a long line of men just a few feet apart and comb the whole island. Of course when the Japanese would jump up and run it would be like shooting jack rabbits. But they were still around. They made runs on our mess hall at night and stuff like that, but anyway, what I was getting around to is the runway that we were supposed to fly off of, which was the center of the island, it was called Depot Field at that time, was not yet complete. We had to land on the Japanese landing strip. We couldn't take off from it with a load, but we could land there and it was so dusty that when the squadron moved we would fly in groups of three and the first one would land and the second two would have to orbit for the dust to settle before they could see to land. Then we lived in tents and we had C and K rations for a while and then the food changed and started picking up, but it was never bad.

Mr. Nichols: Did you have to put up with a lot of rats and snakes and mosquitos and critters such as that?

Lt Col Flocke: Mosquitoes, yes. We all slept on canvas cots and we had all had a frame with a mosquito net, but we really weren't bothered with rats

and snakes and things like that.

Mr. Nichols: Guam was maybe a little more civilized than some of the other islands.

Lt Col Flocke: Well Guam still had people living on it. The other islands, the Atolls we were at were completely devoid of people.

Mr. Nichols: Did you serve from Guam then for the rest of the war?

Lt Col Flocke: Yes I did.

Mr. Nichols: You didn't move on to Okinawa?

Lt Col Flocke: No, when I completed my 40th mission and they said it's time to go home, I said, "I'm gone."

Mr. Nichols: So you didn't remain in the Pacific till the end of the war then? You had acquired enough points to come back to the States before that?

Lt Col Flocke: Not points, but I had completed the required 40 combat missions.

Mr. Nichols: And you never bombed the Japanese mainland or anything like that?

Lt Col Flocke: No, I lived in Japan for three years in the '50's, but that was different. **Mr. Nichols:** I suppose you made some good friends and acquaintances while you were there in the islands?

Lt Col Flocke: Oh yes, yes. Some I have kept up with. Most I have not, but a few of us still keep track of one another.

Mr. Nichols: Do you have reunions or is it large enough to have reunions.

Lt Col Flocke: Yes we do. The group got smaller and smaller. Members keep dying. I think they have in the last year or so they have decided not to have any more, but they were all different places in the United

States. There was one in Houston twenty some years ago and I did attend that.

Mr. Nichols: When you came back to the States, where were you assigned?

Lt Col Flocke: I was assigned to Ellington in Houston for navigation refresher course. **Mr. Nichols:** You never became a navigator instructor?

Lt Col Flocke: Later.

Mr. Nichols: Later. Still at Ellington?

Lt Col Flocke: Still at Ellington. See what happened. The war ended in '45. I got out of the service because everybody was getting out and I thought it was the thing to do. I guess I was out about six months and said, "what did you do that for?" So then I started trying to get back in and I did get back in in 1950 and then I was at Ellington. Then I was a Navigator Instructor.

Mr. Nichols: What rank were you when you got out?

Lt Col Flocke: In '45?

Mr. Nichols: Had you made Captain by then?

Lt Col Flocke: No, no I was a First Lieutenant.

Mr. Nichols: I understand promotions were hard to come by in the Pacific.

Lt Col Flocke: Pretty slow. I retired as a Lt Colonel, but that was later.

Mr. Nichols: When did you retire?

Lt Col Flocke: 1968.

Mr. Nichols: 1968. Twenty years?

Lt Col Flocke: Twenty-six.

Mr. Nichols: Twenty-six years. It is a long career.

Lt Col Flocke: Yeah, and I wanted to stay for thirty, but I was in SAC and SAC was in a turmoil at that time. You never knew where you stood. I was going back and forth to Guam. Viet Nam was going on and it was hectic. So I decided I would try civilian life.

Mr. Nichols: Did you get married right after you came back to the States?

Lt Col Flocke: Yes, in 1945.

Mr. Nichols: In '45.

Lt Col Flocke: That is correct.

Mr. Nichols: Married one of your A&M sweethearts?

Lt Col Flocke: Yes, I sure did.

Mr. Nichols: How many children do you have?

Lt Col Flocke: Three.

Mr. Nichols: Three children.

Lt Col Flocke: Number One is here. I have a daughter in Syracuse, New York. Number Three is sitting back there too.

Mr. Nichols: Either of these young men serve in the military?

Lt Col Flocke: Number one is retired Army.

Mr. Nichols: Did you have any humorous moments that you could relate during World War II? I know it wasn't a humorous time, but you usually find a couple of humorous things that happen to you somewhere down the line.

Lt Col Flocke: Quite a few humorous things happened. One of them that I talked

about just recently. The Navy had delivered all of the food. They were taking what they wanted off of the top and we (the Army) would get what was left. Well, on Kwajalein there was a big, deep lagoon with an atoll all around it and there was a pier that ran way out into this lagoon. This was a Japanese built pier. It ran far enough in the lagoon that the ships could anchor at the end of that pier and trucks could drive on it. Well one day our Mess Sergeant got the word that they were unloading food and these Navy 6 Bys with a couple of guys wearing sailor hats would drive out there and they would load up their truck and drive back. So he scrounged up a 6 By and got a couple of GIs that had sailor hats available and put them on and he got in line. They loaded our truck up with meat, so we ate high on the hog for a while.

Mr. Nichols: Sounds like something like Sgt Bilko would do.

Lt Col Flocke: Well we had a lot of Sgt Bilko's.

Mr. Nichols: Or Corporal Klingers.

Mr. Focke: That is right. (Mr. Flocke's son: Tell them about the seaplane tender). Oh, yeah. Also the Navy had a seaplane tender. I don't remember the name of it that would stay at anchor for long periods of time out in this lagoon. They had ice cream. We had no ice-making facilities or anything like that and so several of us would catch one of these little boats that ferried us out there, and go on board the ship and eat ice cream until it squirted out of our ears and we did that pretty

regularly. **Mr. Nichols:** Yeah, I understand the Navy was pretty famous for their ice cream for their sailors.

Lt Col Flocke: That is right.

Mr. Nichols: I think there was an incident of some shave-tail Ensign trying to butt in line down in the Navy ice cream line and someone told him to get back to the end where he belonged and he started to argue and it was Admiral Halsey that told him to get back to the end of the line where he belonged. I know the sailors loved their ice cream and they actually had ships floating around that were nothing but ice cream producing ships.

Lt Col Flocke: Well this seaplane tender produced lots of ice cream and we'd go out there and really eat it.

Mr. Nichols: We will regress here a little bit. Did you manage to get any Japanese submarines on your submarine patrols or were they elusive enough that you weren't able to get any?

Lt Col Flocke: No, we never saw any. We saw a bunch of whales, but we didn't see any Japanese submarines.

Mr. Nichols: Any Japanese shipping at all that you were able to sink.

Lt Col Flocke: Well we didn't sink any. We bombed and strafed some. Flying out of Guam our main target was Iwo Jima, but just off to the East of Iwo Jima was a group of islands Chi Chi Jima and Ha Ha Jima, and we would go out there and bomb and strafe shipping.

Mr. Nichols: Was Chi Chi Jima and Ha Ha Jima to the north of Iwo Jima?

Lt Col Flocke: More to the East.

Mr. Nichols: To the east.

Lt Col Flocke: Kind of southeast, but they are pretty close.

Mr. Nichols: I am trying to get a relationship between the Jimas because I know George Bush was shot down over Chi chi Jima.

Lt Col Flocke: We have a map here.

Mr. Nichols: But there were so many Jima's that I don't think we could get them all on there. They were all part of the Bonan Islands or the Volcano Islands.

Lt Col Flocke: Well, probably essentially. See there is Iwo Jima. Chi Chi and Ha Ha Jima were just off to the right I believe.

Mr. Nichols: You used the B-24 for strafing?

Lt Col Flocke: Yeah we did. We sure did.

Mr. Nichols: How many gun positions did you have?

Lt Col Flocke: Well, we had a tail gunner with a brace of 50's. They took the turret out and replaced it with just a brace of 50's. A guy was strapped in and sat back there and fired. Because of the extra weight would make the B-24 tail heavy and we needed them as light as possible for fuel consumption. So we had two 50's back there, the waist, we had two waist guns, each one had

Mr. Nichols: These were single 50's in the waist?

Lt Col Flocke: Single 50's in the waist. The ball turret had two, and top turret had two, the nose turret had two, all 50 calibers.

Mr. Nichols: How many pounds did you carry on these missions normally.

Lt Col Flocke: I was afraid that you were going to ask me that and I hadn't thought about it.

Mr. Nichols: Probably 5,000. Does that sound right?

Lt Col Flocke: Maybe more.

Mr. Nichols: Maybe more.

Lt Col Flocke: I'm thinking we could carry 40 one hundred pounders. How many pounds is that?

Mr. Nichols: That would be 4,000.

Lt Col Flocke: Four thousand. We could carry 40 one hundred pounders and that was mostly what we carried, but then sometimes we'd carry 500 pounders, so four or five thousand pounds was our load. We had a long way to go.

Mr. Nichols: And you had a ten man crew?

Lt Col Flocke: Ten man crew. Then we found. I don't want to interrupt your thinking here. But the closer we got to Japan the tougher it was. Now when we were bombing Truk, they had sound controlled anti-aircraft and they would have to look for you. In other words, they would start below you and it would take a while to find your altitude. In fact, at night when we were flying in there with single ships to keep them up all night long, as we approached the island we would hit the sync switches and knock all the props out and go roar-roar-roar and golly that anti-aircraft was just going everywhere. When we got to Iwo Jima

they had radar controlled anti-aircraft and the first shot was in the middle of the formation. Also at Iwo Jima the Kamikazes started. Now none of the raids that I was on. I flew my last mission on Christmas Day of 1944, and shortly after that our squadron commander was killed and the crew went down where they were rammed by a Kamikaze.

Mr. Nichols: Was this during the softening up of Iwo Jima? Or had we already invaded.

Lt Col Flocke: During the softening up.

Mr. Nichols: During the softening up. When there were 25,000 Japanese hiding there.

Lt Col Flocke: Yes.

Mr. Nichols: In tunnels, in caves.

Lt Col Flocke: Yes, yes.

Mr. Nichols: Dug out one at a time.

Lt Col Flocke: One at a time. I have been back to Iwo Jima, back in the '50's when we were living in Japan. For some reason we landed at Iwo Jima and it was just a very small contingent stationed there and we were flying a C-47, I guess it was. Maybe C-119. Anyhow, when we landed, here came this whole group of guys, "Oh, we are so glad to see you."

Mr. Nichols: Did you lose any close friends during your tour of duty over there? Or did you try not to make close friends so you wouldn't lose close friends.

Lt Col Flocke: Well, I had some close friends.

Mr. Nichols: I know your crew would be close, but

Lt Col Flocke: Yes, yes. We had other crews that were came at the same time. I didn't lose any close friends. I lost some acquaintances. They'd go out at night and just wouldn't come back.

Mr. Nichols: Did you receive any decorations during your stint in the Pacific? Air Medal, DFC, or

Lt Col Flocke: Well, I got the Air Medal with I think six oak leaf clusters. I got the DFC with one oak leaf cluster.

Mr. Nichols: Were these based on performance, or number of missions flown?

Lt Col Flocke: Number of missions flown.

Mr. Nichols: Number of missions flown. How many missions did you say that you flew?

Lt Col Flocke: Forty.

Mr. Nichols: Forty missions.

Lt Col Flocke: Four Battle Stars on the Pacific Theater ribbon.

Mr. Nichols: And 40 missions was enough to rotate back?

Lt Col Flocke: Yes.

Mr. Nichols: And get out of the fray.

Lt Col Flocke: Yes, yes.

Mr. Nichols: Can you think of any more instances that you would like to tell us about?

Lt Col Flocke: Well, that just about covers it. One thing. We flew two missions.

The Navy had a photograph outfit over there flying PB-4Y's, which is the Navy B-24. The only aircraft that is compatible is the B-24. So before the Mariana's invasion we took off from Enewetok and there were six Navy PB-4Y's and twelve of us, two on each wing. What we had to do was fly all the way. The first one was to Guam.

Mr. Nichols: How many hours was that?

Lt Col Flocke: Oh gosh, because of the distance and the prevailing wind was from the southeast, we did not have enough fuel. Wait a minute, we carried extra tanks on that mission too. We carried one bomb bay tank. I remember now. Instead of coming back to Enewetok we flew straight south to Admiralty Islands, to Las Negras, which was a Navy controlled island. In other words, we went from here, to here, to here. And then, of course, return we just cut the triangle here. The first mission against Guam was pretty scary. Fortunately, it was a surprise because we found out through records later that they had some aircraft coming in from Japan and we went north of Guam and then flew the length of the island, 62 miles, and skinny of course. We had to fly straight and level the whole length. They didn't have fighters waiting for us because they had picked us on radar, but they thought those were their aircraft coming in. So we could look down and we could see the fighters just taking off like swarms of bees down below us. The zero could stand on its prop and come straight up. So they hit us just about the time that we left

the island, but they couldn't stay with us long. But what was scary about that is we had runaway prop and feathered an engine. Of course, somebody flying with a feathered engine that is the one they are looking for. Fortunately, we got it started again so we continue on down there.

Mr. Nichols: So basically, you only had three wheels on your wagon.

Mr. Locke: We had three wheels on the wagon. That is right and that's real scary.

hundred The second mission all we could carry, we had three one
the weight pound bombs. That was just a token. Because that is all
knew we we could carry. So we all dropped our bombs so that they
could get to them, we could reach them. Just like

Doolittle's Raid. But then the second time we went to Rota, which is a
small island just north of Guam and they traced our tracks and we
were expecting the worst. We got nothing. No flak. No aircraft.
No nothing. So that is the way we liked them.

Mr. Nichols: So the Japanese basically made the same mistake that we may have made at Pearl Harbor when you were flying thinking that you were Japanese airplanes.

Lt Col Locke: That is exactly what they did.

Mr. Nichols: Just like we thought flight of Japanese was B-17's coming in from the States.

Lt Col Locke: From the States, right. They made the same error. You are exactly right there. Of course we didn't know that. It came out later.

Mr. Nichols: And who was the Air Force Commander in the Pacific at the time?

Lt Col Locke: Well the Supreme Commander was Admiral Nimitz. You know in the Central Pacific it was Nimitz, MacArthur was the Southwest Pacific. **Mr.**

Nichols: But there must have been an Air Force General.

Lt Col Flocke: Yes, there was.

Mr. Nichols: Who was actually in charge of the

Lt Col Flocke: I don't remember. We knew Nimitz was our commander. The Group Commander was a fellow named Col Holzapfel, but when you are a 2nd Lieutenant you can't go much higher than a Group.

Mr. Nichols: Didn't LeMay serve in the Pacific.

Lt Col Flocke: He brought the B-29's over there. The 20th Air Force. That was LeMay's baby. So he commanded them and which later turned into SAC.

Mr. Nichols: And when did the B-32's arrive over there? They were there almost at the end of the war weren't they?

Lt Col Flocke: B-32's.

Mr. Nichols: It was an overgrown Privateer actually.

Lt Col Flocke: Oh, I don't know. It was probably late in the war. See I came back to the States in January of 1945. (Comment by Lt Col Flocke's son: It was actually a competitive product of the B-29. It was a consolidated effort at pressurized, high altitude (end of Tape Side 1)

Lt Col Flocke: OK we were entering traffic on Kwajalein one bright, sunshiny

afternoon, and only in extreme emergencies did we break radio silence. You cleared yourself to land. You looked around and if nobody was coming, you landed. So we saw a couple of miles in front of us another B-24 and it was ahead of us in traffic. No sweat. We fell in behind him on the down-wind leg and he turned on his base leg and headed out and finally we turned on our base leg and we were watching him, and instead of turning on the final approach at the end of the runway, he passed the end of the runway and started his final approach. We said, "Oh my God, he's going to land this thing out there in the lagoon." Well he did, but it was a PB-4Y2. Actually a PB-4Y, the 2 had the single tail. But it was the same configuration, Davis wing, twin tails, and everything as the B-24 and he looked like one of us.

Mr. Nichols: We've kind of rambled here.

Lt Col Flocke: Yeah we did. Talked a long time.

Mr. Nichols: But you know we got to keep picking and probing and bringing back things to the surface that you may not be able to think of. We want to get all of this down on tape. We want to put it in our archives. We want young people to be able to come here and look up situations and pick out these tapes and be able to listen to tales of World War II from the people that participated.

Lt Col Flocke: I was there.

Mr. Nichols: That is our whole objective here is to set up archives. We put about

14,000 school kids through here a year.

Lt Col Flocke: Great.

Mr. Nichols: We've got to give them as much transfusion about World War II as we can because I don't think exactly learn too much in school any more. Have you been infused with much World War II?

Lt Col Flocke: About three weeks ago my Granddaughter, his niece, she is a senior in high-school asked me to meet with her class and there were four of us, World War II and after and we made talks to them. They were very interested. I was impressed with the students.

Mr. Nichols: They are interested and some of the groups that we get here have had some World War II ingested into them before they get here and they ask some pretty good questions. They are relatively knowledgeable. They are like little sponges. They soak up this stuff real well. We just have make sure we get them dipped in the water so they can soak it up, so to speak.

Lt Col Flocke: Right.

Mr. Nichols: Well, Lt Col Flocke if you can't think of anything else, I think just about ran out of questions.

Lt Col Flocke: I think that is just about it.

Mr. Nichols: We certainly appreciate you taking the time and the effort to come here and tell us some of your World War II events and I think anytime anybody starts talking to a World War II veteran they learn more and more, even in their own families they have a habit of not talking a lot.

I had a gentlemen in here the other day who told me that this was probably the first time that he had ever really talked about things that happened to him during world War II. I think he was a B-24 crewmember also.

Lt Col Flocke: Well, Emma, my granddaughter, after that little talk I gave at school, she came up to me and said, "Grandpa you said some things about you today that I never knew." I said, "Well, you never asked."

Mr. Nichols: It is good that we keep talking because our World War II veterans are diminishing rather rapidly.

Lt Col Flocke: Rather rapidly, that's right.

Mr. Nichols: We have to honor them as often as we can, as much as we can. Well Sir, I think winds it up and I thank you for your time and attention.

Lt Col Flocke: Very good.

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