

Frame and Houseworth

Mr. Nichols: This is Chuck Nichols at the Fredericksburg Inn and Suits. I am interviewing two gentlemen this afternoon, Mr. Bill Houseworth and Mr. Leonard Frame. They were P-39 pilots, they served in the Pacific. It's approximately 1300 hours on the 4th of October 2001. We'll start with you, Mr. Houseworth, would you tell us when and where you were born, please sir.

Mr. Houseworth: I was born in Ardmore, Oklahoma in February the 20th 1920. I moved as a very young child to Cement, Oklahoma, an oil town, and grew up in and around Cement. I went to grade school at Cement. I went to high school at the neighboring town of Cyril, and graduated in '38. And then I went two years at junior college at Lawton Cameron Junior College and took the CPT program there. Then after that I didn't get selected for the advanced CPT and I didn't have any money, so I decided I might as well try for the flying cadet corps, since at that time you could get in with two years college. And sure enough, I made it. And I graduated in Class of '41 – E in July of '41.

Mr. Nichols: OK, lets backtrack a minute. What were your parents' occupations?

Mr. Houseworth: My father was a pumper and roustabout in the oil field, and my mother raised kids. (Laughs)

Mr. Nichols: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Houseworth: I had four sisters. Two older and two younger.

Mr. Nichols: Did any of those serve in the military?

Mr. Houseworth: No, they did not.

Mr. Nichols: OK. Let's get a little information from on you here, Mr. Fame, if you would tell us when and where you were born.

Mr. Fame: I was born October 27, 1917. And our address was Selma, California. We lived about nine miles from town. I went to Canejo Grammar School and Laton High School and graduated in 1934. I was only 16 and my mother thought I was too young to go away for school, and besides there was no money, so I went back to high school for another year. Then I went to Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, which was then a vocational school, now it's a university...its listed in some of the top schools of the nation now, but it was a little different then. They had a three year course; I majored in dairy husbandry. In 1940, when the draft had been passed and I expected that I would be in something, I started looking and stumbled on to a traveling flying cadet board in Fresno. Went in and they said "Well, come back tomorrow with [a] birth certificate and three letters of recommendation, and we'll give you a physical." I did that. And they said, "Well, you need to have your tonsils out. Can you get your tonsils out?" Well yeah, I guess I can get

my tonsils out. “You get your tonsils out and have a certificate from the doctor, and get your transcript from Cal Poly and send those in.” I did that probably in the first part of November of 1940. Then I got a letter back that said, “Well, we’ve got everything here except an application. Would you fill this out (Chuckles) and send it in?” So, I did that. And I got a letter in December that said I’d been accepted and that I’d probably go in February and I did not go, I went in the middle of March 1941. Class ‘41-H.

Mr. Nichols: And what did your parents do?

Mr. Frame: My father was a farmer, my mother, in the summer time, worked in fruit, cuttin’ apricots and peaches. And then she worked as a packer [for] Sun Maid raisin growers.

Mr. Nichols: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Frame: I was the youngest in the family. My brother died, apparently drowned in August of 1941. My sister is still living at 86 or 7. Neither of them served in the military.

Mr. Nichols: OK. Mr. Houseworth, where did you take your pilot training at?

Mr. Houseworth: I started primary at Santa Maria, California, flying PT-135; and then after primary at Santa Maria, we rode the train to San Antonio, Texas, and I took basic at Randolph and advanced at Kelly.

Mr. Nichols: What kind of an aircraft were you flying for your basic and advanced?

Mr. Houseworth: BT-9s and BT-14s for Basic and BC-1s and AT-6s for advanced.

Mr. Nichols: Were the BT-9s in basic bi-planes?

Mr. Houseworth: No, they were all modern planes. The BT-9 was a forerunner of the BT-14. It's North American...The BT-9 was the previous design. It had minor problems of not having very stable stall characteristics, so they went to the newer airplane, the BT-14, which was a wonderful airplane. The BC-1 was a retractable gear of the same general design and it was the forerunner of AT-6.

Mr. Nichols: You never flew the Vultee "vibrator" [BT-13]?

Mr. Houseworth: Never flew a vibrator. I did fly in one, one time, but I was just riding.

Mr. Nichols: What about you, Mr. Frame, where did you take your pilot training?

Mr. Frame: I took primary and basic both a Cal Aero, Ontario. I think it was one of the first civilian schools that gave basic. And primary, I went middle of March of '41, primary we had Stearmans, and basic we had the Vultee "vibrator". And went to Stockton for advanced and flew AT-6s.

Mr. Nichols: I guess AT-6 was pretty much the trainer of choice for advanced training.

Mr. Houseworth: It was the modern trainer. The BC-1 was a previous version, a little bit more power and just didn't have good flying characteristics.

Mr. Nichols: And they were still using AT-6s into the '50s for pilot training.

Mr. Frame: Oh yeah, later on they started them out in AT-6s instead of Stearman and the Vultee "vibrator"; they put them in the AT-6.

Mr. Nichols: Where were you at, Mr. Houseworth, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Houseworth: Specifically, I was about half way across the Golden Gate Bridge headed for Hamilton Field. I had been stationed TDY in San Francisco, I was going back out to check my mail and have lunch and one thing and another. So I kept going and I checked in.

Mr. Nichols: You were already at Hamilton or you were heading for Hamilton?

Mr. Houseworth: Yes, I was stationed at Hamilton.

Mr. Nichols: And this is where you started flying you P-39, at Hamilton, or P-40s?

Mr. Houseworth: No... P-40s, we'll get to the P-39s in time.

Mr. Nichols: And what about you, Mr. Frame?

Mr. Frame: I was stationed at Hamilton. I was assigned to the 35th Group and the 35th Group was in process of going to the Philippines. Half of two squadrons were there when the war broke out. Some more had left at Thanksgiving time and had stopped at Hawaii and then they were on high seas and all of those were diverted to Australia. My squadron, the 70th, was supposed to sail the morning of the 8th. We had commanders call at 10:00 the morning of the 7th, at Hamilton Field for all the officers of the 70th. They called the role and Lt. Vicillio, the squadron commander, said, "Well, everything's all set, be here tomorrow morning at 8:00 and we'll get on the buses, go down and get on the boat, and we'll be on our way. Dismissed." This was at 10:00, the morning of the 7th. My wife, who's now my wife, was my girlfriend, had gone out to the Field with me and my parents had come up from Selma and had spent the week-end with my aunt, who lived in Berkeley. So they were going that morning to San Francisco that morning to visit friends and would be back for lunch; so we went to church. She wanted to go to Nob Hill for

church, so we went to the Grace Cathedral for church and then back across the bay. As we pulled up in front of my uncle's house to park and he came running out, "The Japs just bombed Pearl Harbor!" "Where's Pearl Harbor?" (Chuckles)

Mr. Nichols: I understand a lot of people said that, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" Any specific thoughts that went through your mind on this?

Mr. Frame: The next morning we did not get in the bus and go down and get on the boat to start for [the] Philippines. Chaos was reigning over confusion.

Mr. Nichols: What about you, Mr. Houseworth, any specific recollections of what you thought when you heard about the attack?

Mr. Houseworth: We had gone on maneuvers in the first of September and through the 41 fall maneuvers. I had flown [a] fair amount on maneuvers and we got back into Hamilton field on the first of December. We took ten of our airplanes up to Sacramento and they were supposed to be winterized and sent to Alaska. We rode a transport back. After the Japanese struck, we considered ourselves reasonably ready. Probably the 7th, or it may have been the 8th, they got ten of us together to go up and pick up our ten airplanes. The people at Sacramento wouldn't turn them loose because they didn't have the gun charger mechanism so that it would charge the guns in flight.

Mr. Nichols: These were P-40s that you were going to pick up?

Mr. Houseworth: P-40s. So we stalled around there for two or three days trying to get those air planes. They wouldn't turn them loose, so we came back to San Francisco. At that time the defense of San Francisco was pretty marginal. If anyone had come in with anything, they could have got through what little bit of airplane[s] we had.

Mr. Nichols: Where were you at this time?

Mr. Frame: I was stationed at Hamilton. After the attack, like I said, we were supposed to go the morning of the 8th, and nobody knew what was goin' on and what was going to happen. So, we were there, but there wasn't anything for us to do and we didn't have any airplanes. I think it was at that time that somebody went someplace and borrowed five Stearmans and we got flyin' time in so we could get flight pay. So that raised the moral a little bit. (Laughs) Fightin' the war in a Stearman, but anyhow, we did get our flyin' time in. Between Christmas and New Years, I, along with several of the fellows in the 70th squadron, all of us were fresh out of flyin' school, I was sent over to the Oakland Municipal Airport to one of the squadrons of the 20th Group and got checked out in P-40s. So I got six hours and ten minuets in a P-40, made me a real pursuit pilot.

Mr. Nichols: And when did you get checked out?

Mr. Houseworth: I got out to Hamilton toward the middle of July and got checked out fairly quickly. The first fighter I flew was a P-36. I just had one pass around the pattern,

but they checked me out in that, because it didn't have quite as big a nose as the P-40 and it was a little bit simpler airplane. Then [I] checked out in P-40s. We had As and Bs to start with, I checked out in those. And then I had been sent on two weeks TDY to Mitchell Field and got to be an air controller there, which is a pretty marginal job, at that time. Then we started on maneuvers on the first of September.

Mr. Nichols: This was '41 or '42?

Mr. Houseworth: '41. We went through Louisiana and then up to Connecticut, and back to Charlotte, North Carolina. The last flights of our maneuvers, they called maneuvers off on Thanksgiving Day, '41, and we flew that day; and got everyone in the air and the weather closed in behind us. That was the wildest time getting back on the ground (chuckles). But our squadron made it with no problem. Then right after that we headed back for San Francisco. [We] had stops in Memphis, Oklahoma City and I don't know where else, probably Salt Lake City, and on into San Francisco.

Mr. Nichols: When did you leave California out across the Pacific and how did they transport your aircraft, or did they transport the aircraft (someone laughs)?

Mr. Frame: Well, first, I was married on the 7th of January and on the 12th of January we got on the boat finally. And it was the *President Monroe*...

Mr. Houseworth: Yup.

Mr. Framee: ...and the 70th squadron went as a squadron. We had 35 pilots in the squadron.

Mr. Houseworth: I was assigned to the 70th squadron.

Mr. Frame: He was one of the ones... We had ten pilots that had from, what, 150 hours and up in P-40s...

Mr. Houseworth: I think so.

Mr. Frame: ...and he was one of the ten. I was one of the 25 that had six hours and ten minuets. The rest of the 25 of us were just about the same. There were two of the junior pilots that said they'd flown a P-39, one of them had an hour and a half and the other said he had 15 hours. I had seen two or three sittin' on the ramp at Hamilton Field, maybe 200 yards away, and that's as close as I had gotten.

We got to Suva, well, first off, the trip to the Philippines was a secret destination. We didn't tell anyone but our best friend and the barber. When we left the 12th of January to go to someplace, the only thing I knew was that the supply officer, I guess it was, came around and collected two dollars and an half from each officer for a pith helmet. Oh, we're going to the Tropics. Well, that covers a lot of territory. (Laughs) One of the fellows, Tom Lanphier, I thought was one of the sharpest guys in the outfit, he and his girlfriend had gone uptown and found a Atlas, that had a double page spread of [the]

Pacific Islands and he put a circle around this group and a letter in it, and a circle around this group and a letter in it...and "The first letter of the first word of my first my letter home is were I am." Fine. We were out about three days, word had begun to drift around the ship "We're going to Fiji". "Where in the world is Fiji?" "Isn't that where the cannibals eat the missionaries?" (Chuckles) He went and checked his book and Fiji wasn't in any circle that he had drawn. (Laughs) But we went, my recollection was that it was 18 days, and we came into Suva Harbor. There were 25 big boxes in the hold that they fished out and put on barges and took around the edge of the island up a river and set them off at... I think it had been a polo field.

Mr. Houseworth: No, it was an airfield.

Mr. Frame: But it was a grass field, no hard stands, and it rained. We had a Bell Tech. representative that was pretty ingenious, I think, in the way of getting things done. And he managed to get those things off the barges and up on the field and the water was 20 feet below the ground level there, where the river was, and no equipment...

Mr. Houseworth: They dragged the crates off the barge and up the beach

Mr. Frame: ...and I don't know what they had to drag them with...

Mr. Houseworth: I don't know. They'd drag them with somethin'.

Mr. Frame: ... we didn't have Caterpillars. But anyhow, they got these 25 boxes up there and started taking the sides off of them..."Oh, there's a P-39, so that's what a P-39 looks like." The mechanics had never worked on them, but they took the sides off of the boxes and started putting them together and the Bell Tech. rep. went around and "Well no, that bolt doesn't go there, it goes here. And this goes on here, and this goes on..." And as they got them together, they checked out some of the older pilots, some of these senior guys to do the test flights, and then they flew them across the island to Nandi and we packed up everything and moved across to Nandi and the rest of us got checked out there.

Mr. Houseworth: I don't know how many people actually got checked out.

Mr. Frame: Well, I don't either.

Mr. Houseworth: I didn't get checked out. Well, most of us I think, when they got a plane ready, we'd read the manuals and they'd talk to us and everything. But our first flight in a P-39 was backed up against the dike and pour the coal to it and get it in the air and fly over to Nandi.

Mr. Frame: Well, at least you flew from there to Nandi.

Mr. Houseworth: My first flight, though, was out of that place...

Mr. Frame:: Didn't have to land back in there. (Chuckles)

Mr. Nichols: Did you leave a bride sitting on the dock, so to speak, before you left?

Mr. Houseworth: No. No, I didn't. I got married after I got back. But the trip over was interesting, I thought. I had never been on a ship, I was from mid-Oklahoma. So, we got aboard this thing and the *Monroe* had been on its maiden voyage on the 7th of December. And they turned it around and came back and installed a .50 caliber on each side of the bridge and a three inch, I think, on the fore deck and on the fantail. And that was our protection. As I remember, we left out of San Francisco in a convoy with the *Mariposa* and one of its sister ships.

Mr. Nichols: Was the *Monroe* just a standard merchant ship that they had...

Mr. Frame: No, it was a commercial liner and as far as my concepts was, all they did was paint over the white paint and make it OD and we had a purser and ... of course the officers got taken better care of. But we had state rooms and there was a printed menu everyday for what was on the menu and all the things of a first class ship.

Mr. Houseworth: We had a lounge that had a piano hooked up to the side of the wall. The real characteristic of the ship, as I remember it, was the way it rolled. We had a destroyer escort for a while and this ship was rolling as much as a destroyer was. On the trip, we drove south across the equator, and then headed west. We were still the three ships, for a time, by ourselves, and then we picked up an Australian cruiser, temporarily.

And we were driving along and one night, in the middle of the night, we made a wild turn and they went to full power on the ship. [We] got up the next morning and there was nothing in the ocean. We were it – one ship.

Mr. Nichols: Do you recall where you crossed the equator at? Did you have a ceremony of any kind when you crossed the equator?

Mr. Frame: I don't remember of any.

Mr. Houseworth: We had our dollars bill.

Mr. Frame: Well, that was "short snorter" bills. That didn't come up 'til, as I remember, until we were in Fiji.

Mr. Houseworth: OK. They had some little ceremony, I don't know. But we got into the harbor at Suva and they closed the submarine net behind us and we stayed aboard the ship, one, two nights. I don't know.

Mr. Frame: Yeah, three or four nights, I think. Well, they had to take tents up there and set them up. So it wasn't done...

Mr. Houseworth: No, it wasn't done immediately.

Mr. Nichols: The tents were your quarters then, when you got

Mr. Frame: Yeah. Where they put the airplanes together, there were tents. When we got over to Nandi, there were barracks there for us. On the main base we had wooden barracks, then they built a fighter strip for ourselves. There was a plantation there, and they took over the plantation house for the officer's mess. They built, they called them burries, because theoretically this was going to look like a native village, so they were 20 foot square, 18 foot square...

Mr. Houseworth: Yeah, about that.

Mr. Frame: ... for four people, and wood sides and sheet iron roof, with palm fronds over the sheet iron so it wouldn't show.

Mr. Nichols: What kind of mess facilities did you have?

Mr. Frame: There was a large building there that had been the caretaker's house for the plantation.

Mr. Houseworth: That was the officer's mess.

Mr. Frame: I think they just pitched a tent for the men to start with and then later built somethin' for them.

Mr. Houseworth: It was fairly nice, I think.

Mr. Nichols: Fairly decent food?

Mr. Frame: Well, (chuckles) to start with we had New Zealand lend-lease rations. Rice and curry and mutton, and mutton and rice and curry, and so on and so on...

Mr. Houseworth: And tropical butter. The stuff wouldn't melt in the frying pan.

Mr. Frame : Yeah. And then General Tinker came out. One of the few American Indians that ever made general. Tinker Air Force base is named for him. We had taken American rations with us, but they were savin' those. And he came by and told us "If you aren't going to use them, we aren't going to send you any more." So then we started getting a little better [food]. Once in a while the Navy would come in with somethin' and occasionally we would get some steak and ice cream from those guys. (Laughs)

Mr. Nichols: And they always had ice cream.

Mr. Frame: Yeah.

Mr. Houseworth: The *Saratoga* came in there and sat for a little time. They were going to go out and have gunnery practice. I don't know, four or five of us got to go aboard. I

was going out with them...we got out and sat out in the bay for that day. Sat out the next day and the next day they loaded us back up and took us back on shore. Some Japanese sub had been reported out near there and they didn't want to risk the carrier out just for gunnery practice. So [I] never got to do anything with the carrier. (Laughs)

Mr. Nichols: And you took your gunnery practice right there, after you picked up your P-39s?

Mr. Houseworth: Yeah.

Mr. Frame: What gunnery practice we had. (All laugh)

Mr. Houseworth: What we had, which was minimal.

Mr. Frame: [Written insert:] my most frightening time in an airplane occurred while doing "ground gunnery". A leader with a flight of four planes would pick out a rock of the coast to use as a target. The leader would put us in a string then fire at the rock. The following pilot would fire at the same rock. I think Bill Houseworth was leading one day and I was "tail end Charlie". I was a little behind and when it was my turn to fire I was in a vertical bank about fifty feet off the water when I hit the prop-wash of the plane ahead of me. I thought the plane was going to roll over and hit the water, regardless of what I did to the controls – but it did not. It straightened up and flew right.

Yeah. We did some ground gunnery and we didn't have anything to tow targets with... There was a New Zealand Squadron there that had Vickers Vincent and a Vickers Vincent was about twice the size in every direction of a Stearman and not much more horse power. A little bit more, but not much; flew about 70 miles an hour, big bi-plane. Our squadron commander borrowed one of those a while for us to tow targets with. Then somebody ground looped one and they wouldn't let us have it any more. We got a little bit of gunnery with that, then they came up with the idea, well, can't have that, lets tow targets with a P-39. Well, I think they used a rope when they were towin' with the Vickers Vincent...

Mr. Houseworth: Maybe, I don't know.

Mr. Frame: ...but when they went to the P-39, one try and the rope snapped when they went off. So they had control cable for the P-39. OK, take a piece, and I don't know how long it was, probably a thousand feet...

Mr. Houseworth: A pretty long cable, the longest we could get.

Mr. Frame: ...they would set the P-39 at the end of the runway and they would string the cable out here 'long beside of it and stand a man in the back of a pickup here with this sleeve that we were going to shoot at. And as the P-39 would start to roll, the pickup would start to roll, and this guy in the back would watch this cable go by (chuckles) and

when he thought it was time he would throw this thing in the air. I'm surprised that nobody every got caught in that thing, but they didn't. We got it in the air.

One day a flight when out and the first guy that made a pass at the target shot it off. So they called the guys flying the tow plane, "drop your cable and we'll make dry runs on you." OK, he pulled the handle. And nobody could tell if he dropped the cable or not and the first guy came in at about a 90 degree angle, bendin' around be hind him and wap, wap, wap, wap as the cable hit the propeller. And before he could tell the next guy, the next guy came in and that cable caught the wing just right next to the cockpit. And it went in there, and it looked as if somebody had taken a band saw to it, went in about a foot.

Mr. Houseworth: Went in to the spar.

Mr. Frame: It was close enough to the cockpit that he couldn't see it. So he came back into land and the ailerons wouldn't work. We always made a pretty tight pattern, but as he came in, he couldn't get it around (chuckles), so he went around and made a great big patter and got it lined up with the runway, got it on the ground, taxied up [to the] gas tank and opened up the door and looked out and 'bout had a heart attack, the way this thing was cut there.

Mr. Nichols: What kind of armament did the '39 have, 20mm?

Mr. Houseworth: The ones we had had 37mm out the nose and two cowl guns, synchronized .50s.

Mr. Nichols: Shooting through the prop?

Mr. Frame: Yeah. Synchronized.

Mr. Houseworth: Did we have

Mr. Frame: Two .30s on each wing.

Mr. Houseworth: Two on each wing, .30 caliber. It was interesting to watch the tracers as you fired all guns at once. The 37mm lobbed up and back down and the .30 calibers came in, fair elevation on them, and the .50s right straight out in front. The trouble was firing through the prop. The .50s were synchronized, so it was slow. They didn't do near as much damage as the free-firin' .50 did.

Mr. Frame: When we first started doing any shootin', we had some old ammunition and it would hang fire on the .50s. So the blade came up here, and the synchronizer says "Fire" and the cap says "Well, not quite."

"Well, now?"

"Yeah, now." And then a blade was in the way. If they went right through the hub, in one side and out the other, it wasn't bad, but if it went in the hub and flung out to the tip,

then everything was out of balance. So there was a time when we had two or three airplanes sittin' on the side because they needed props. Before day light, once we got flyin', we always had four people sittin' on alert, and then about 8:00 AM, they would take off and do the morning patrol. When they came back in the runway was such that when you landed you were looking right in the sun. And the end of it came out and dropped down about 20 or 30 feet to the ocean, almost straight down. Maybe we had 15 hours in the airplane and one fellow was determined to get on the end of the runway and he got there a little too soon, so when he got to the end of the runway, his gear was below the edge of the bank. He was comin' in with his nose up alright, but he wiped the main gear off. Just wiped it off. He couldn't see, but he hit the throttle, went around and came back in and set it down. It set on the nose wheel and rolled a little ways and the tail came down and [it] drug on the tail and came to a stop and just eased over on one wing tip. So it sat on the nose wheel and one wing tip and the tail. And he got out of it and they went out very carefully with a sling and took the propeller off of it. Then they took a tug and just drug the airplane out of the runway (laughs), but they had to save the propeller to put it on one of those planes on the side of the runway.

Mr. Nichols: I always thought that the nose gear looked kind of flimsy on those P-39s. Did you have trouble with the nose gear collapsing?

Mr. Frame: I don't remember ever seeing a nose gear collapse.

Mr. Nichols: It looked kind of long and skinny...

Mr. Frame: Yeah, it does.

Mr. Houseworth: We had some problems. One flight of us went back over to Suva and flew off of that little short strip for a couple of months...

Mr. Frame: Yup.

Mr. Houseworth: ...and it was kind of hard on [the] airplanes, 'cause we had a dike at one end and a drainage canal at the other, and it was 3400 foot long. And that was pretty marginal for a '39. But we had one guy who came in toward the dike and landed and almost stopped. He was probably across the dike at less than 20 mph. The nose gear rolled up, didn't buckle it, rolled up; main gear came up the bank just about the time the nose gear was going down the other side and ...flat on its back. (Laughs) We lost ...some one went into the ditch on the other end. We didn't try to use that field too often. They finally decided that we were close enough to Suva that if any attack came, they could get over and help them out.

Mr. Nichols: Did they issue any special flying gear or anything out of the ordinary for flying? Did you have oxygen masks or heated flying suits?

Mr. Houseworth: We had oxygen masks, but you have to understand that the P-39 was a low altitude airplane. It was not a high altitude airplane. It had a single stage blower and

its maximum effective altitude was about 15 – 16 thousand feet. You could wobble one up with a wobble pump and sweat it up to about 25,000, but I don't think that anyone has ever been able to get much beyond that.

Mr. Frame: Well, I had one once to indicate 30,000 one time, but it was barely staying up.

Mr. Houseworth: Ineffective.

Mr. Frame: ...it would have been no good at all if there was something to run away from, maybe run away, turn it upside down and go...

Mr. Nichols: Did you have to wear life vests or anything?

Mr. Frame: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Houseworth: See, we were on Fiji and ...how long was it, about 20 miles, 30 miles?

Mr. Frame: Yeah, I don't know.

Mr. Houseworth: It wasn't very big...

Mr. Frame: We would take off and we would be flying over water half the time or a third of the time...

Mr. Houseworth: More than that.

Mr. Frame: ...so we wore Mae West all the time and then latter on we got the little one man rubber life rafts that was part of the seat pack on your parachute. That was alright for us short guys, but we had a couple of guys, they didn't come over with us, but they came down latter, that were about six feet. And one of them said, "I can't get into the airplane with that." And the other one says, "If you want that boat bad enough, you'll figure out a way to get into the airplane with it." They both needed the boat. One of them didn't get home.

Mr. Houseworth: They would set the seat pack down beside them and clip it to their harness. One guy was flying with a leather pad, [a] single sheet of leather, over the parachute and it had the rip cord ran through a tube down right between the cheeks of his butt. (Laughs)

Mr. Nichols: You wore a seat pack parachute?

Mr. Frame and Mr. Houseworth: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Houseworth: He would sit on that thing for an hour. How he ever did it, I don't know.

Mr. Nichols: [Did they] issue any side arms for you to carry? A .38 or a

Mr. Frame: Before we left, right after Pearl Harbor, they issued all of us .45 automatics, and we were supposed to carry them all the time after Pearl Harbor. When we got to Fiji there was a medical administrative unit that came in, camped just up the road from us, and some of the guys got to talkin' to them and those officers were armed with a .45 Colt revolver. There were three or four of us that went up and traded automatics for those revolvers, because if I ever need this thing and it's been in salt water and it's been in sand, the automatic wouldn't work, but the ol' revolver still revolves. (Laughs) I never had to use it, but I still have it.

Mr. Nichols: Nobody was issued .38 revolvers?

Mr. Frame: For a while, up at Guadalcanal, they issued them .38s with a shoulder holster, but as far as I know, the understanding I had was that nobody got off of Guadalcanal with a .38. That was one thing that they really checked on, if you signed for it, you turned it in, or you didn't get off (chuckles) the island.

Mr. Nichols: Did you carry a canteen with you, of water while you were flying?

Mr. Frame: I think we carried a canteen.

Mr. Houseworth: May have. I ...

Mr. Frame: We had a web belt and some stuff on it, the gun and a knife sometime, I don't know, I think there was a canteen.

Mr. Nichols: A first aid kit, maybe?

Mr. Frame: Well, the first aid kit was in the backpack.

Mr. Houseworth: I had a little Smith and Wesson pistol, a .22 long rifle, and I put that in my backpack. I could hit something with that. With a .45, I couldn't throw it and hit it, I would miss. (Laughs)

Mr. Nichols: That was just about a standard weapon for a kid from Oklahoma anyway, wasn't it? (Laughter) A .22 pistol for hittin' jackrabbits with.

Mr. Houseworth: It came in handy. One time, I fired it for effect. The fourth of July, they decided to have a picnic. Some one rounded up a cow, so we were going to have a barbeque. They came out to butcher the cow and they took a .45 and popped it in the head and it shook its head, [and] stood there. They shot it about four or five times. It had

no effect on that cow. So I went and got my .22 and shot it in the head and that killed it.
(Chuckles) But that's the only time that I ever fired it, other than just practice.

Mr. Nichols: And when did you leave Suva? Did you go down to Guadalcanal from there?

Mr. Houseworth: Different times. You were in the earlier group, so go ahead.

Mr. Frame: When Guadalcanal was invaded on the 7th of August '42, then the 67th squadron was in New Caledonia and they had P-400s, the export version of the '39. They flew from New Caledonia to Esprito Santos, then on to Guadalcanal. And then about October, they sent ten or twelve pilots went from Fiji to New Caledonia and then on up, and then some more went. It was March of '43 before I went. One of the fellows that had been up for his first tour up there and came back was R. W. T. Rivers, and he got ten of us at that crack and we went on a Navy flying boat out of Suva and up to Esprito Santos and then on a C-47 from there up to Guadalcanal.

Mr. Nichols: Was it still called "the Cactus Air Force" when you went?

Mr. Frame: Yeah. The Cactus Air Force was essentially anything around Guadalcanal.

Mr. Nichols: It was "Operation Cactus" when they invaded Guadalcanal. And you went to Henderson Field, but I guess it was the only field there...

Mr. Frame: I went to Henderson, we landed at Henderson, but by the time I got there, they were operating Fighter 2. So I operated my two tours up there was both off of Fighter 2.

Mr. Nichols: And where was Fighter 2 located? Was it north of Henderson Field?

Mr. Frame: North of Henderson, across the river...

Mr. Houseworth: About two miles, five miles maybe.

Mr. Frame: Yeah, five miles, maybe.

Mr. Houseworth: It's close.

Mr. Frame: When I first got there, there was P-39s and P-38s and I think a New Zealand squadron of P-40s, maybe we had a squadron of P-40s, and some Wildcats operating off of that field. And a little later on, they took the Wildcats over to Fighter 1, or some other strip, but we had P-39s and P-40s and P-38s operating off the strip there at Fighter 2.

Mr. Nichols: The Marines were flying the Wildcats?

Mr. Frame: I don't know if it was Marines or Navy, some of each.

Mr. Nichols: Didn't they have a grass strip along side of Henderson Field too, as kind of a (Garbled)

Mr. Frame: They may have. They kept at least four fighters in the air all the time over Guadalcanal. I had a flight of four up there one day. All the fighters were on the same frequency, Marines, Navy, Air Force, New Zealanders. And this Wildcat pilot called in...

[End Tape One]

...he couldn't get his wheels down and there was quite a conversation went back and forth. He wanted to go land it on the grass beside the runway on Fighter 2 and they told him no, put it in water. And he didn't want to do that, he'd rather put it on the ground, no you put it in the water. So I picked him out down there and watched him, and he put it in the water right along the beach. They had a boat in the water and went and picked him up. That was one of the things I remembered about some of our experiences there.

Mr. Nichols: And when did you head down there?

Mr. Houseworth: I don't remember the exact timing, but it was in March, I think. They decided to move all of the 70th from Fiji and relieve the 68th ...

Mr. Frame: The 68th, the enlisted people, the mechanics and all the ground crew.

Mr. Houseworth: ...and let them just trade. I was still on Fiji at the time, so we went by ship. And got off the ship and checked in and flew two or three times up there. They decided they had enough pilots up there, so I went back to Fiji on the ship with the 68th... (Laughs) Then, oh about two months, I got up to Guadalcanal for my tour.

Mr. Nichols: What was your primary mission on Guadalcanal? Just to harass enemy shipping or chase any Japanese aircraft?

Mr. Frame: By the time I got up there, the Japanese ground troops had been taken off the island. The air action was pretty quiet. There were three or four days, during six weeks time, that the Japanese...the Coast Watchers would call and say, "Well, there's a 120 comin'" or "There's 40 comin'" or something and we'd get in the air. My first contact was, they had called and said that there's a big bunch comin' and I was sent with four planes up to Russell Islands. And they said "Go to 25,000 feet" and I got to 20 and one of my wingman called and said, "If you go any higher I can't go with you." And I said "OK" and we stayed at 20 thousand and we just circled around and we never saw anything. We heard the guys talkin' in the fight that they had, and that all quieted down and fighter control never called me back and I finally called them and said, "Do I stay up here or do I come home?"

"Oh, you can come home."

So I started home and I was down to probably 14,000 feet, just off Cape Esperance and one of my wingmen call and said, "How's your oxygen?" And I looked at my gage and told him what it was. "Well, I'm all out; incidently, there's a bogie at 9:00 o'clock." I

looked over there and there's a Zero goin' the other way. Since I was leadin' the flight, I had first crack at him. I whipped around and chased him and he made a turn and I cut him off and came up under him and pulled up and just one squirt and it started to flame and he peeled off and he bailed out. But the ship was flamin', so he was done.

When I went up for my second mission, I got up in the afternoon and the guy who was the detachment commander up there said, "Well, you have to take this search mission". Originally there were two search missions every morning by P-39s. One went up the backside of New Georgia and came across Munda and came back. One around St. Isabel by Ricotta Bay, where the seaplane base was. They had started another one that you went North, then West, North again, East, then South to the base. "Oh, I haven't done that one. I wanna wait until I get settled. I ..." (Laughter) He said, "No, you take it." OK. So the wingman and I took off, we usually took off pitch dark in the morning for those flights. I was out there minding my own business and here comes an airplane towards me. "Oh, that's a B-26. But we haven't got any B-26s up here. Oh!" And he was goin' east and I was goin' west and I made a big turn in the sun up above him and looked at him and there was a great big meatball on the side of him...

Mr. Nichols: And it was a Betty?

Mr. Frame: Yeah, a Betty bomber. My wingman and I each made three passes at him and when I pulled up from the third one, I looked back and it was flamin' at the wing root. So we just pulled up and watched him and he had it under control. He put it in the water, made a nice landing. But he must have been 40 miles from home.

Mr. Nichols: You don't know if it was you or your wingman that nailed him?

Mr. Frame: No, we...split it...

Mr. Nichols: Both of you got half a credit a piece...

Mr. Frame: Yeah.

Mr. Nichols: Did you have any encounters, Mr. Houseworth?

Mr. Houseworth: Actually, two (chuckles). First one was on this two day tour that the Japanese sent a bunch down at the same time that you were telling about...

Mr. Frame: Yeah.

Mr. Houseworth:...and I was flying wing on someone and we were up about 12000 and attached to some airplane, things all quiet down real quick. Someone reported a bogie on the deck headed for us. So we started down that way. There were some P-40s down below us and they started shootin' at him, he made a immelman, then he made another immelman right on top. None of our airplanes had that kind of power. (Mr. Frame chuckles) After he finished that immelman he did a tight 360, and someone nailed him in

the 360. But it was more dangerous from our own planes than him, because there was a whole bunch of people around this one Zero.

Mr. Nichols: Can you describe the immelmans, for people who don't know what a immelman is, will know what a immelman looked like?

Mr. Houseworth: It's a half loop and roll out at the top. On most U.S. airplanes, at that time, you got through the immelman and you came out at the top pretty close to a stall. To immediately be able to go into another immelman was just something we couldn't do. But the Zero was a real flying machine, as long as it didn't get hit.

Mr. Nichols: And you don't know who nailed the one you encountered?

Mr. Houseworth: I have no idea.

Mr. Frame: Probably somebody claimed it.

Mr. Houseworth: Someone claimed it. I knew I wasn't it, because the few shells I fired were way off.

Mr. Nichols: And this was before gun cameras, so....

Mr. Frame: We had some gun cameras, but we were not using them. We didn't have enough to use and I don't think they had the developing capability. Somebody fiddled around with them on Fiji a little bit...

Mr. Nichols: So you had to rely on the wingman or somebody to....

Mr. Frame: Our intelligence section was a dug out in the side of a hill, about the size of this room. When we went in there to debrief, such as it was, if I said "I shot one down," "Oh, you shot one down. Did you see it crash?"

"Well, no."

"Well, did you see it flame?"

"Well, no."

"No credit."

So, my understanding was, I had to be able to say, if nobody else saw it, I had to be able to say I saw it flame or I saw it crash.

Mr. Nichols: You said you had two encounters, Mr. Houseworth?

Mr. Houseworth: A little bit later, they were getting close to landing at Munda, but they were still softening the place up. We were on a patrol route...

Mr. Frame: Yeah.

Mr. Houseworth: ...and, I think probably five or six Zeros were run across up there. I wasn't close enough to even shoot at them, but some of the people were and, I think, probably got them all. That's the only Japanese I actually saw flying. I didn't even get a shot at the second one.

Mr. Nichols: Did the P-39s carry bombs?

Mr. Frame: Occasionally, yeah.

Mr. Houseworth: They were fairly good for skip bombing dives. If you did it right. We did dive bombing against a float-out in the bay. And our target was a 55 gallon drum, as I remember, painted white, and we used to splash water on it.

Mr. Nichols: Neither of you had any encounters with Japanese ships, or anything?

Mr. Frame: I didn't.

Mr. Houseworth: We were looking for any action, Japanese action, along the coast on these patrols, and I never saw anything at all. After that time, the idea was that they were going to land on Munda on the fourth of July of '43. They actually landed on Munda and secured it in August. It was quite a long time before it was secure.

Mr. Frame: It was a pretty rough go.

Mr. Nichols: And where is Munda in relation to Guadalcanal?

Mr. Frame: It's north and up the slot.....

Mr. Houseworth: 200 miles?

Mr. Frame: ...just about 200 miles. When they were going to take Munda, they landed first on a little island to the west of it. And when they started that, they kept all the fighters they could get over them all the time. As I recall, the P-39 mission, with our belly tank, was an hour up, two hours on station, and an hour home. So that would make it about 200 miles.

Mr. Nichols: Was it between Guadalcanal and Bougainville?

Mr. Frame: Yes. Probably half way.

Mr. Houseworth: Did you ever use the little strip that was on the south end of New Georgia?

Mr. Frame: No. It wasn't there when I left.

Mr. Houseworth: What was the name of that? Do you remember? Seqi point?

Mr. Frame: I don't know. Sam Barns talked about that.

Mr. Houseworth: On my second trip up, we used that thing. It was very marginal. It was, as I remember it, 2900 foot long. The manual said that a P-39 would stop at 2800 foot on the concrete, so it was close (chuckles). And they actually tried to do night landings and night flying off of that thing with P-39s. After they lost two airplanes that were trying to get in, I think they called it off.

Mr. Nichols: How did they light these runways, did they light them?

Mr. Houseworth: Flares.

Mr. Nichols: Just flares.

Mr. Houseworth: And the problem with the night operation was that on one end you had to come down the hill and land and stop fast because there was water at the other end. Or if you came in from the water, there was no approach light or anything else. One night, a guy came in, and he was high the first time, so he went around. He was right on the money the second time, but he thought he was high and he went around. The third time he hit the water two or three hundred feet out and dumped the thing, and it went to the bottom. And that was a very deep ditch at that point, a couple hundred feet down.

Mr. Nichols: I know all you guys are buddies, (someone laughs) or you wouldn't be here all together for a reunion, but did either of you have any special appointments when you were young, or anybody that may have lost, or anything of that nature?

Mr. Frame: Actually, of the original crew, the original 35 pilots that went over seas, we lost Waldo Williams; we lost Blose, who spun-in in Fiji. A couple of guys who didn't want to fly fighters and they transferred out one way or another; one guy slow rolled a jeep and they had to send him home with a broken back; and another guy broke a back and they had to send home. We lost Farren; he was apparently shot doing strafin' up on Guadalcanal, and I think they found his airplane and what was left of his body in it. We lost Topol; he was in one of the P-38s and he lost one engine and came in and overshot the runway and Tried to go around and ended up in the water.

Mr. Houseworth: We were a lucky bunch.

Mr. Frame: Wallace Dinn was one of our originals, and he got shot in a P-38. I think he got his plane caught on fire and he didn't get out of it. But all in all, out of the 35, our losses were fairly light, you know, when we first got to Fiji we lost Blose, who spun-in. I don't know if we lost anybody else. And then we'd been there five, six months and we started gettin' replacement pilots in, and it just seemed to me that we lost about one a month of those people. When we went over seas, like I said, I had six hours and ten minuets in a P-40. Nobody knew anything else about the P-39, so we weren't scared of it. It was a fighter airplane – fly it.

Mr. Houseworth: Yeah, we learned to fly it.

Mr. Frame: But we got these fellows who came in as replacements and had 60 to 80 hours in the airplane and they were about half scared of it. We (laughs) did what we called the “Widow Maker.” You come in and dive right at the end of the runway and peel out the four airplanes and get them on the ground. And some of those guys, the first day they came out there, “Oh, you can’t turn that airplane with the wheels and flaps down!”

Mr. Houseworth: They had been flying off of 9000 foot concrete down in Florida, and we had 5000 foot of rock. You just can’t stop a P-39 in 5000 feet, unless you slow it down. These guys were landing, apparently, in the States at 135 mph.

Mr. Frame: At the training base in the States, they started loosing people and the high brass [said], “You’ve got to stop this. You can’t be killing all of these people.” Yap, yap, yap, yap.

“Well, OK, how do we stop it?”

“Well, you make a bigger pattern. Well, you do this...”

I remember after I came home from over seas, I was at Colorado Springs in a fighter pilot training unit. We were flying P-40s. A flight would come in and they would get to the end of the runway and start taxiing back, and you can’t see anything out of the front of it. So they would just turn around at the end of the runway and start taxiing back and the

next thing you know blip, blip, blip, blip, there's [the] tail gone! (Laughs) "Well, how do I stop this?" Well, they started putting crew chiefs out there at the end of the runway and you sit on the wingtip and wave at the guy (laughs). And all kinds of ideas they came up with trying to stop this, when what would stop it was common sense.

Mr. Nichols: So you lost more by accident than actual combat?

Mr. Frame: Yeah. But that mentality on the trainees' part when they got over seas was still hangin' on to them. It's a dangerous airplane. It will tumble, it'll do this, it'll do that.

Mr. Houseworth: When we first started flying the replacements, we set a jeep out at the edge of the runway with a radio and talked them in. "Slow it down, slow it down, slow it down." Finally we would get them slow enough to land and stop. But it was a real retraining program, because they did not know how to fly the airplane.

Mr. Nichols: _____personal GCA. Ground Control Approach. It seems like there are always some humorous incidents that occur, even in war. Did either of you have anything funny happen along the way?

Mr. Frame: When we got our own strip, away from what we called the main base at Nandi, which was just three or four miles down the road, but it was our own strip. They put up some 2x4s and some chicken wire for a baseball backstop. For a long time we

were the only air unit on the whole island, and so as long as we kept our nose more or less clean, we did pretty much what we wanted to do. So a guy came in and was going to buzz the field one day and he picked out the up right on this backstop and he was just going to lift his wing over it. Well he lifted his wing over the one he was lookin' at, but that was the second one in. So the first one in, he caught right in the middle of his wing. Broke the backstop off and put a dent in the wing. And the squadron commander said, "Well, you know guys, things shouldn't be quite that boisterous."

Mr. Nichols: Did they make him pay for it?

Mr. Frame: No, I don't think so.

Mr. Houseworth: They used to buzz the runway and the criteria of how low you were was how much dust you created. That's kind of dangerous flying.

Mr. Nichols: Any body come back with leaves hanging off the wings tips or...

Mr. Frame: One fellow came back with a coconut in his air scoop. (All laugh)

Mr. Houseworth: The one I remember, and I don't even remember who it was that did this, we had an emergency field out there some place that they had posts in. The idea was if they bombed our strip, they would pull the posts and use that one. One of the guys was

buzzin' the thing and he pulled up sharply enough over one of the posts that he dented the cooler flap on the oil cooler. You know where that was?

Mr. Frame: (Laughing) Yes.

Mr. Houseworth: Back behind the engine. It was way inside the prop diameter.

Mr. Frame: Well, the fellow who got the coconut, he'd met some girl who lived in Lautoka, which is a little town 10 – 15 miles from where we were. He had gone over and buzzed the town and he went back to see where it was that coconut came from, and apparently it was a one story house with a fairly steep roof and the top of the coconut tree was below the peak of the roof; so he had come down the side of the roof and picked that coconut up out of the tree. And somebody was buzzin' Lautoka one day and there was a bunch of high brass in the hotel there, Navy and Army both, havin' some kind of a conference. And the story was that they crawled under the table because they thought this guy was (laughs) comin' through the window. (Laughs)

Mr. Houseworth: We also had a bridge over on the Suva side. It was [a] pretty low bridge, and a few guys on there way to town a few times decided they would measure this bridge. First off, there had been telephone wires strung along the edge of the railing of the bridge. Finally, they moved the telephone wires down below the railing so they didn't get cut every time. They went out and measured the distance between the piers and the distance from the bottom of the bridge to the water and decided that a P-39 would go

through it. One day they were buzzing down the river, and one of the guys caught sight of the bridge and hit the mike button, and said, "Now's your chance, Farron." Farron was apparently one that flew under the bridge.

Mr. Frame: Yeah, he was the one who said he could do it.

Mr. Houseworth:so he flew under this thing. It was about an eleven foot drop, some thing like that...it was close...

Mr. Frame: I understand that the piers were eight foot wider than the wingspan of the airplane. I understood him to say that he had picked out a set of piers to go between and the wind drifted him, so he had to take the next set. The sequel to that...

Mr. Houseworth: Yeah, we got some of these replacement people... (Laughter)...and one of them was....

Mr. Frame: He was the hottest pilot there was. And you didn't have to ask him, he told you.

Mr. Houseworth: ...from Hawaii...

Mr. Frame: They had been in Hawaii and they came on down.

Mr. Houseworth: ...and he heard the story of Farron flying under the bridge, so he flew under it too, just to prove that it could be done.

Mr. Frame: After Farron got through flying through, he said, "I can do it again, but I'm not going to." This guy went over and flew under it twice to prove that he was the hottest pilot there was. Sam Barns told me that he was flyin' off that strip on New Georgia and apparently went out to slow time an engine and didn't come back. Apparently, he went out strafin' some Japs and they got him. He didn't come back anyhow.

Mr. Houseworth: That strip upon the...south of Munda was narrow. I don't know how wide the thing was, but I flew out of that on a C-47 when I left and there wasn't much clearance for the wingtips (chuckles) in that thing.

Mr. Nichols: I know fighter pilots like to imbibe occasionally after a mission. How were you fixed for liquor?

Mr. Houseworth: There was plenty around. I wasn't much of a drinker.

Mr. Frame: I was a tee-totaler, so... In fact, after one of those deals when the Japanese sent a lot of airplanes down, they passed the liquor out pretty freely, and I heard guys getting' up and heavin' their guts out in the middle of the night and what-not. And I said something to myself, "Well, I'm glad I've been a tee-totaler so far and if that's the way it is, then I'm going to keep on that way." (Laughs)

Mr. Houseworth: It was fairly understood...

Mr. Nichols: When did you leave the combat zone? When did you come back to the states?

Mr. Frame: I came back in September of '43. I had done my second tour at Guadalcanal and gone down to New Zealand for rest leave and I thought "Well, you know most of the guys, (of the original 35), have already gone home. So group headquarters [is] in New Caledonia, so I'll stop there and see what's goin' on". I stopped and walked on the base and somebody said, "Hey, I see you've been assigned here."

"Oh?"

"Yeah."

So I checked in and talked to Lt. Col. McNeece, who was the group commander.

Koenig, Kuntz, and Frame all ran together, as far as our promotions were concerned, and we were all captains. Kuntz was down in New Zealand on rest leave and I don't know if he had malaria or he wasn't feelin' good, or somethin' – whether he was gunna ride that out and get home on a medical, or not. Koenig had been assigned with me at Group Head Quarters, so he came in a few days after I got there and McNeece says, "Well, I really don't need you guys here. Frame, you stay here. Koenig, I'll attach you to the 68th over at Fiji for quarters and rations." So he went back to Fiji. I was the ranking officer in the operations section, so I was operations officer. (Laughs) Which means, if the sergeant brings you somethin' to sign, sign it and (laughing) and let it go at that.

One day, when the 67th was still on New Caledonia, they had some fuel scattered around the place and the supply officer said, “Well, I think there are some drums of aviation gas over on the other side of the island. I’d like to go over and see.” Well, they had a Piper Cub, a little two place tandem thing. And I said, “Yeah, I’ll take you over.” Somebody had landed a P-38 over there in a cow pasture, three or four weeks before that. And they put some gas in it and flew it home. Well, I’ll take you over there, if he can land in a cow pasture, I can land in a cow pasture.

So, we went over there and we found this cow pasture alright, but it had been rainin’. It wasn’t rainin’ then, but it had been rainin’, and the cow pasture was just a sheet of water. I got it on the ground down to about 15 mph and one wheel dropped into a chuck hole. And of course that chuck hole was full of water. The wheels went out and bungee cord was the stretcher, and the hook on the bungee cord broke off, so it just went out and the wingtip went down on the ground. Oh, shoot. Well, we left it there and went on into town. We couldn’t speak French and nobody there could speak English. This supply officer finally decided that there wasn’t any gasoline there, so we could go on home. I had looked at the situation and figured out that if I had a piece of rope about three feet long, I could tie that thing up and get it up off the ground. So they looked around (chuckles) and the only thing they could find (laughing) was about an inch and a half or two inch piece of manila rope. So they sawed me off a piece about three foot long and I unraveled it, so I (laughs) could have somethin’ I could tie a knot with.

Two or three guys came out with us, and I got them under the wing with their shoulders and lifted up so I could pull that thing more or less back in; tied it up. In the mean time, it had become over cast. And we had come over a pass and there was that

canyon we had to go up. And I told the guy, "Let's go. We can always do a 180 if we can't make it and come back. But I'd rather not. I don't want to stay here all night with people I can't understand what they're sayin'." (Laughs) So, we went up and over the top of this pass and maybe there was 20 foot clearance between the pass and the overcast and just beyond it the sun was shinin'.

Anyhow, we got home and I parked the plane. I got in the jeep and I drove up to the operations officer and the sergeant says, "Hey, Captain! You made the team!" What kind of a team am I tryin' to make? My orders had come in. First available government transportation, U.S.A. (Chuckles) So, I cleared the base that afternoon. They had a UC-78 there and I got somebody to take me up to the ATC base, where the transport planes went through. I got on a LB-30 and the first stop was Fiji. We stayed there overnight. Koenig and Robinson were there and they were both on the orders and they hadn't seen the orders yet. (Laughs)

Mr. Houseworth: (Laughs) So, you got to carry the orders.

Mr. Frame: Well, I give them a set of orders and they went and made...you know if all the guys that made certified of orders had been hooked for having improper orders... (Laughs heartily) Anyhow, they made some copies of the orders. The plane I was on stopped at Christmas over night and then we got to Hawaii. We got to Hawaii at about 8:00 in the morning and the operations people said, "Well, you can't go out on this plane to night. It goes out at 6:00 and we have priority passengers." And I said, "Well, you know, do I get out tonight?"

“Oh, yeah, we’ll get you out tonight.”

Well, I went out at 8:00, on a different plane. I got into Hamilton and went through processing and got my orders. When I got off the plane at Hamilton, here was Robinson. He already had his orders and was on his way. A (laughing) C-54 had come through and he’d got on that ... (Laughing). So, they give me 30 days leave and said, “They’ll telegraph your orders and if you don’t get them, don’t come back here. We don’t want you.” (Laughs heartily) And I didn’t get them. Well, I think I got them a week late, but anyhow. But I got home in September of ’43.

Mr. Nichols: And this kind of ended your military career?

Mr. Frame: When I finally got my orders, I was in California. My orders were to Plant Park, Tampa, Florida, which, when I got there was a replacement depot. And they said, “OK, where do you want to go?” And I said, “I want to go up to the 4th Air Force back in California.”

“Where in the 3rd Air Force do you want to go?” (Laughs)

I went to Waycross, Georgia. I was there for a couple of months, month and a half, and I was sent from there to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I got there at Christmas time in ’43. They were supposed to start a new replacement training unit, but there was a fighter unit somewhere in the 3rd Air Force that was training to go to Europe and apparently they weren’t getting the job done. Our group commander went down to 3rd Air Force head quarters and sold them on the idea that he could get it done. There was a four squadron group that we had and they cut it back to three for the unit that was going

to go over seas. The group commander called everybody personally that had been over seas and said, "Do you want to go again?" And there was quite a bunch of us who had been in the South Pacific and I don't think any of them wanted to go again (chuckles)...

Mr. Nichols: You all declined.

Mr. Frame: ...So they shifted around and the squadron that was left went to Tullahoma, Tennessee for a month or six weeks of maneuvers. Then we ferried the P-39s to Portland, Oregon and went to Dalhart, Texas where, here again, they were formin' a replacement training unit in the 2nd Air Force. We had P-40s there. We were there for three or four months, then the same unit moved to Colorado Springs. I got promoted to major at Colorado Springs and they were settin' up a unit to do intercepts on the B-29s with P-63s. The 2nd Air Force was supposed to be trainin' bombers and supposed to be trainin' fighters, and fighters were supposed to be doin' intercepts and bombers needed intercepts, but to coordinate all this thing just didn't work out. And they had pilots comin' out their ears. They had people comin' back from over seas, had done their combat; didn't want to do any more combat. The 4th Air Force had been usin' P-63s for fighter training and they were makin' enough P-38s, so they gave the P-38s and the '63s are surplus.

The 2nd Air Force got those and started out with three units, more or less squadrons, and each would be assigned about three or four bomber bases that they were supposed to go and spend a week there and do the intercepts and come home. They had three of those units and they were goin' to form a fourth one and I was supposed to be the C.O. of that

one. I came home Thanksgiving time of '44 for a leave and when I got back was goin' to go to Pocatello, Idaho. This is where my unit was gunna be. So, I came back and my little kingdom had fallen down around my ears. The bomber people said, "We want those P-63s on our base all the time. Just give us the airplane. We'll fly them." Well, bomber pilots got holes in their heads. They can't fly fighters. So, the up shot of it was that they put about six P-63s on each bomber base and about eight or ten pilots.

But the weather in Kansas and Nebraska was bad durin' the winter time and their training was boggin' down. And somebody says, "Gee we have those beautiful bases down in the Caribbean. There's Cuba and Puerto Rico and Jamaica, and the weather's good there all the time. Why can't we stage down there and do our trainin'?" and all that. "Hey, well that's a good idea." So they formed the Gypsy Task Force, the administrative unit of this outfit. I went down there as part of the P-63 unit; first to Puerto Rico and then back to Cuba. They had a guy up in the states that they wanted to get rid of (laughs) and they sent him down there to relieve me and I went back to Colorado Springs. I was there for a while and I didn't have anything to do, so finally I said, "Send me down to Tucson and get me out of everybody's hair." And they sent me down there. I was there for six weeks or so and then they dropped the bomb and I had enough points, and I wanted a diary farm, so I got out and got the silly thing.

Mr. Nichols: And where was your wife all this time? In California?

Mr. Frame: When I first got home, she was working in Portland and I went to Portland and we took the train back down to California and spent time with our family there. We

bought a car and drove to Florida and we drove up to Waycross and then on up to Myrtle Beach, and then to Tullahoma, and then to Dalhart, and then up to Colorado Springs. She did pretty well until we got to Dalhart. All we could find there was one bedroom and down the hallway was a bathroom with two or three bedrooms in between. Besides, she had worked for a nursery in Portland and it was their shipping season and she would rather (laughs) go help out with their shipping season than put up with Dalhart. Dalhart was the only place I could ever stand in mud up to my knees and have dust blowin' in my face. So, she went up to Portland and when we got settled in Colorado Springs, she came back to Colorado Springs. I went down to the Caribbean in January of '45 and she came home. And she stayed home then until I got out. I got out in September and my terminal leave was up in November of '45.

Mr. Nichols: So she became a farm wife then?

Mr. Frame: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Nichols: Did you receive any decorations of any kind while you were ...?

Mr. Frame: DSC, an Air Metal, and the Purple Heart.

Mr. Nichols: And when did you receive your Purple Heart? We didn't talk about that.

Mr. Frame: One of these time when Japanese airplanes were comin', they held us on the ground and finally said "go" and I had a flight of four and we got up to about six, seven thousand feet and spotted some dive bombers diving down. We headed towards them and about six or eight Zeros came head on to us. And I shot and I'm sure everyone else shot and I didn't see anything happen. I don't know whether anything happened or not. I made about two turns and there wasn't an airplane in the sky. (Laughs) I was lookin' around and all of a sudden I looked over my shoulder and about as far from here as that tree over there I saw it, probably farther than that, there was a Zero sittin' there with the leading edge of his wings blinking. And I came up like this to make that diving right-hand turn, and as my wing came up, a 20mm shell hit the wing, just right next to the fuselage. Made a hole about one foot in diameter in the skin, and a fragment came through the side of the cockpit and hit my ankle. When I got on the ground, I went over to the medical tent and he swabbed it off with alcohol and put a Band-Aid on it. I went up and took a shower and washed the Band-Aid off and they gave me a Purple Heart, so I don't talk very much about it. (Laughs)

Mr. Nichols: A Purple Heart is a Purple Heart regardless of

Mr. Frame: Yeah, yeah. And there were some of them that really earned it, too. I had a friend, a Marine, that was on one of the Pacific Islands and he was in a foxhole and a five inch shell exploded over top of him. If you didn't notice it, you didn't notice it, but all of his muscle wasn't here. He got along pretty well. He was tellin' me they got him to a hospital ship and then they got him to a hospital, I guess he was in a hospital ship. He

was supposed to come home and he had orders to go on the airplane, but they had him in a full body cast. He got out to the airport, pilot took one look at him and said, "I'm overloaded already, I'm not going to take that thing." One of the jeep carriers that had taken a torpedo hit, I think, it was going back to Pearl Harbor for repairs. It would run, but it wasn't capable of combat. So they put him on that. They took all the crew off that they didn't really need to run the ship, so all they had was just the operating crew. They had 26 Army nurses and 15 Army engineer types and this guy in a body cast. So, he had good care comin' home. (Chuckles) He said the ship would pick up speed and get up to what they thought was cruising and it would start to vibrate; then they would have to just chop everything back and let it slow down and settle in the ocean and pick it up again. They would come and ask him, "is there anything we can do for you? Is there anything you want?"

"I want some ice cream."

"Well, when the ship got hit, they fouled up all our refrigeration equipment"

"Oh."

Well then, the next day or so, here comes ice cream. The Army engineers said, "shoot, were refrigeration people, we can make it work". (All laugh) And I think all they had was powdered milk and canned peaches, so he had peach ice cream. (Laughs heartily)

Mr. Nichols: OK, we've you home safe and sound. Now we have to get Mr. Houseworth.

Mr. Frame: OK, you get him home.

Mr. Nichols: And I think we've got to change tapes in order to get him home.

Mr. Houseworth: OK.

[End Side Two, Tape One]

Mr. Nichols: OK, Mr. Houseworth, let's see if we can't get you home from the Pacific.

Mr. Houseworth: OK. I was up on this little short strip in New Georgia, and we'd been flying morning patrol up around Munda and back. Munda was in use at that time. We would take the morning patrol, go up, land at Munda and spend the day, and then they wanted us to take the evening patrol, and we couldn't do that because we didn't have landing lights at the strip where we were goin' back in. So, we finally talked them out of staying all day, because we had the morning patrol every day it seemed like. The bad thing about it was that we would take off before breakfast, by the time we got back, the breakfast was all finished, and so we got whatever we could make a breakfast out of, which sometimes was nothing more than canned peaches and soda crackers. We did that for a while and finally I got sick, run down, I don't know, and so they decided to evacuate me back to Fiji, which was fine with me. I was glad to go. I went out of there on a C-47 and a couple of stops and we were back in Fiji. I got in there [and] they fiddled around for three or four days and finally said, "You're excess baggage," and gave me orders home. So I caught an LB-30 and rode the mail sack all the way back to the States.

Mr. Nichols: What was an LB-30?

Mr. Houseworth: It was a converted B-24. It closed up the bomb bay and used it to carry mail...

Mr. Nichols: Cargo hauler.

Mr. Houseworth: Yeah. They had, usually, two or three seats in them. On this particular one, I was just flyin' the fastest way back; it didn't have any seat in it, but lots of mail sacks, so I just bedded down on the mail sacks. I don't know how many crewmen they had aboard that thing, but we were basically, straight through, Fiji to San Francisco. They stopped and gassed, but that was it. We didn't layover any place.

Mr. Nichols: You stopped at Hickim to gas up?

Mr. Houseworth: Yeah, we stopped to gas up and on to San Francisco.

Mr. Fame: You didn't stay over night at Hickim?

Mr. Houseworth: No, we gassed up and headed on. And got into San Francisco, and this was late November '43, and we got orders for leave and an airline ticket. So I rode the airlines from San Francisco to Oklahoma City. I hadn't had time to call the folks from

San Francisco, or anything, so I showed up in the little town of Cement. [I] got off the bus, tropical clothing, but I didn't even have a tie. It's a wonder they didn't throw me off the airplane.

Mr. Frame: Some MP didn't take you in.

Mr. Houseworth: I had time up in San Francisco to have a steak, I remember that, and slept the rest of the way...

Mr. Frame: Did you land at Hamilton?

Mr. Houseworth: I don't remember, it must have been Hamilton, gave me orders right straight on the first airplane out that I could.

Mr. Nichols: Is Hamilton near Oakland?

Mr. Frame: Its north from San Francisco, across the Golden Gate Bridge, at San Raphael. It was one of the country clubs of the Air Force in 1939 and '40.

Mr. Houseworth: No longer there.

Mr. Frame: No, (chuckles), they still call it Hamilton; there's a big sign there with somethin' about Hamilton. It's a development now. I don't think the runway is in use at all.

Mr. Nichols: McClellan just closed.

Mr. Frame: Yeah. They may be still using the runway at McClellan.

Mr. Houseworth: I got back to home and rested up. And my wife to be, Marge, was going to school up at Ames, Iowa at the time. She came down with some friend to Oklahoma City and said she was going back up there. And I was going to Salt Lake City for reassignment. Anyhow, we rode the train back up to Ames and I spent a week of leave up there, then on to Salt Lake City. I got assigned to the 2nd Air Force, back down by train to Hammond, Louisiana and spent some time there in the P-47 out fit. It was just a...I had never flown a P-47 and I thought "monster airplane", but it flew like a dream. I was there until, actually, the first of the year. Then we moved the whole out fit over to Abilene.

Marge and I had made plans to get married in April. We were all set and I got a week's leave to go up and get married. Got up there and we went out to get our license and make arrangements for a Monday wedding, and got back from goin' over to the court house and had a call from Abilene. If I wanted to take it, I could take an assignment to 2nd Air Force head quarters and the come on was [I would] probably get major out of it.

The catch was that I had to catch an airplane up from Oklahoma City the next morning, Sunday morning, up to Bruning, Nebraska.

Mr. Nichols: And your wedding was gunna to be Monday?

Mr. Houseworth: My wedding was gunna to be Monday. So we drove out and parked out on the side of a country road for a little bit and discussed the situation. Marge decided that a bird in hand was worth two in the bush any day, so we got married Saturday afternoon. (All laugh) And got up to Oklahoma City that evening and went out to Tinker and caught the airplane [the] next morning. The guys from Abilene brought up a A-25 and took me on up. Got up there just ahead of a snow storm; landed and it was comin' in so violently that the guy that brought me up just gassed the airplane and went back out.

The people I was supposed to meet from Colorado Springs didn't come. So, I spent my honeymoon there for the next three days in a snowstorm in Bruning, Nebraska. But we thought...

Mr. Frame: Were you at Peterson Field?

Mr. Houseworth: Actually, I was assigned to head quarters.

Mr. Frame: I know, but that's where you were snowed in?

Mr. Houseworth: No. This was at Bruning, Nebraska...

Mr. Frame: Oh.

Mr. Houseworth: ...out in the corn field. (Chuckles) Anyhow, we got together and the job was tactical inspector for the training program. So that was fine, but the airplane that was taking the inspection crew around was a B-25. I'd never flown a B-25. The guy that was also assigned as the chief inspector was a B-17 pilot. He liked flyin' instruments and I was scared of instruments, quite frankly. So we flew around and inspected various places.

Finally made the trip around and got to Abilene. And I had told Marge that I would be in Abilene at a certain time. So, I got my clothes, they were still at Abilene, and we took the bus back up to Cement. Then, on the way back up, I was carrying my parachute with me. Sure enough, we got into Cement, but the bus driver had forgotten the key to open the baggage compartment. Said, finally, "we'll take the baggage off at Oklahoma City and send it back on the next bus." The next bus didn't have my parachute on it. It went on down to Lawton and I finally traced it down there. They had to send it back on the next bus. I said, "Don't let it out of your sight. Hang on to it. We'll drive down." (Laughter) We drove and picked the baggage up and finally got to Colorado Springs. That job lasted about two months and then they assigned me to the squadron there at Peterson Field.

Mr. Frame: In a training unit?

Mr. Houseworth: Yeah. P-40 out fit. Then the whole out fit moved from there down to Dalhart. In the mean time, when the inspection job had really run its course, I had applied for maintenance officer training at Chanute and went up there and got that. That's where I was when the war ended. I was planning to stay and they finally sent me up to Madison, Wisconsin to be the officer in charge of a crew going to Japan. I was just a transit officer, I was supposed to come back. So, got up there and we got our crew people together and started processing them. Then they came out with the word that if you had so many points you could get out. Well, that shot our shipment group, because most of those guys had come from the European Theater and they wanted out immediately, so they got out. So, we got another group together and started processing them, just about through with them and they changed the criteria, and they got out. They did this one more time and change the criteria and I said, "Fine. I'll get out too."
(Laughter) So, that just...

Mr. Nichols: So you got out too, before the war had actually ended, you got out?

Mr. Houseworth: Yes, the war had ended. These were people going to Japan as occupation troops.

Mr. Nichols: Oh, I see.

Mr. Houseworth: I got out and went to University of Illinois. Then I decided I'd go back in, if I could. And the Korean War was on, so I got back in and I stayed back in until January of '55, I got out.

Mr. Nichols: And did you finally make major?

Mr. Houseworth: I made major on the inspection tour. They held up their part of it.

Mr. Nichols: And what were you when you got out? Were you then a Lt. colonel?

Mr. Houseworth: I retired as Lt. Colonel; I never served as Lt. Colonel. That was in '55. I went ahead and maintained the reserve status until I had enough time to start drawin' retirement at 60. Still hangin' in there.

Mr. Nichols: Did you receive basically the same decorations in WWII that Mr. Frame did? The DFC, Air Medal...

Mr. Houseworth: Not a Purple Heart. I never even saw one.

Mr. Nichols: Did they base the Air Medals on the number of missions flown, pretty much?

Mr. Frame: As I understood it, at least in the 13th Air Force, ten missions or one airplane. Theoretically, if you got ten missions, you got an air medal and then you got an oak leaf cluster and for each ten after that. The fifth one was supposed to be a DFC, at least that's the way I understood the procedure. But if you did somethin' special, you got a DFC anyhow.

Mr. Nichols: OK, I think we've pretty well covered your careers. We certainly appreciate your sitting hear talking to us.

Mr. Frame: We appreciate (laughing) your patience at our rambling (laughs).

Mr. Nichols: We're going to have this transferred to paper and we'll mail you each a copy. You can make corrections and mail it back to us and we'll put it in our archives for the generations down the road to read, or for researchers to read.

Mr. Houseworth: Find out what life was like.

Mr. Frame: Yeah.

Mr. Houseworth: Thank you very much.

[End Tape Two]

Tapes 307 and 308
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