

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

THE NIMITZ MUSEUM

PRESENTS

AN ORAL HISTORY BY

JAMES R. "JIM" O'DONNELL

SERIAL NO. 0-697903
499TH BOMB GROUP
878TH SQUADRON
20TH AIR FORCE
CREW 25

TAPE NO. 348

MY NAME IS CLARENCE BRYK AND TODAY IS DEC. 8, 2001 AND I AM INTERVIEWING MR. JIM O'DONNELL WHO IS A VETERAN OF WORLD WAR II AND HE WILL BE TALKING TO US ABOUT HIS WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCES. WE ARE VERY PLEASED THAT HE TOOK THE TIME TO BE WITH US.

O'DONNELL

I WAS BORN AND REARED IN THE LITTLE TOWN OF DONORA, PENN. WHICH IS ABOUT 12 MILES OUTSIDE OF PITTSBURG.

HOW I CAME TO BE IN THE AIR FORCE WAS A FRIEND OF MINE, TOM CLARK, WAS JOINING THE NAVY. HE SAID, IF HIS MOTHER AND DADDY TOOK HIM INTO THE TRAIN STATION TO SEE HIM OFF, THEY WOULD BE CRYING AND HE DIDN'T WANT THAT, SO I DROVE HIM THERE TO THE TRAIN STATION. IN THE STATION, THEY HAD A POSTER SAYING IF YOU JOINED THE AIR FORCE AND YOU HAD TWO YEARS OF COLLEGE OR COULD PASS AN EQUIVALENT EXAMINATION YOU COULD QUALIFY.

WE HAD ABOUT AN HOUR AND A HALF TO SIT AROUND SO I TOOK THE EXAMINATION. THIS WAS IN JUNE OF 1942 AND I WAS CALLED INTO SERVICE ON DEC.9, 1942. FROM DONORA, PA.I. WENT TO SAN ANTONIO, KELLY FIELD AND HAD APPROXIMATELY 6 WEEKS OF TRAINING. I HAD QUALIFIED FOR ALL THREE, PILOT, NAVIGATOR AND BOMBARDIER AND I WAS SENT TO PILOT TRAINING IN VERNON, TEXAS. AFTER ABOUT THE THIRD TIME UP IN THE AIR, THE INSTRUCTOR, (WHEN I CAME IN FOR A LANDING) ASKED ME HOW HIGH I THOUGHT I WAS AND I SAID, "500 FEET." HE SAID, "YOU WERE AT ABOUT 150 FEET AND IF YOU DON'T GO BACK ON THE STICK, WE'LL BOTH BE DEAD." I WASHED OUT OF PILOT TRAINING AND THEY ASKED ME WHAT MY CHOICE WOULD BE. WOULD I LIKE TO GO TO BOMBARDIER SCHOOL OR NAVIGATION SCHOOL? I TOLD THEM I'D LIKE TO GO TO BOMBARDIER SCHOOL. SO, THEY SENT ME TO NAVIGATION SCHOOL.

I WENT TO NAVIGATION SCHOOL AND GRADUATED IN NOVEMBER 1943. UPON GRADUATION, THEY AGAIN ASKED WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO. I SAID, "I WOULD LIKE TO GO OVER TO ENGLAND AND FLY B-17's IN THE 8TH AIR FORCE. SO THEY SENT ME TO BOMBARDIER SCHOOL. AFTER I GRADUATED FROM BOMBARDIER SCHOOL, I WAS SENT TO CLOVIS, N.M. AND THAT IS WHERE WE FORMED OUR B-29 CREWS. THE FIRST MEMBER OF MY CREW THAT I MET WAS A GENTLEMAN NAMED CHESTER MARSHALL. HE CAME UP AND TAPPED ME ON THE SHOULDER AND SAID IN A SOUTHERN ACCENT DRIPPING WITH HONEY. "IS YOUR NAME O'DONNELL?" I SAID, "IT SURE IS." HE ASKED, "WHERE ARE YOU FROM?" I SAID, "I'M FROM

PITTSBURGH, PA. WHERE ARE YOU FROM?" HE SAID, "BELZONI, MISSISSIPPI." I SAID, "WHERE IN THE HELL IS THAT?" HE SAID, "HAVE YOU HEARD OF YAZOO CITY?" I SAID, "NOPE, IN GEOGRAPHY I HAD HEARD OF JACKSON, MS. AND THAT WAS IT."

THE REST OF OUR CREW WAS, JOHN W. COX WAS OUR AIRPLANE COMMANDER; CHESTER W. MARSHALL WAS OUR PILOT, HERBERT M. FELDMAN OUR BOMBARDIER; JOHN W. HUCKINS WAS OUR FLIGHT ENGINEER, ALVIN F. TORRES OUR RADIOMAN; ROBERT J. SLIZEWSKI WAS OUR RADAR MAN; GEORGE W. KOEPKE WAS OUR RIGHT GUNNER, ARLE LACKEY WAS LEFT GUNNER AND KENDEL A. CHANCE WAS OUR CENTRAL FIRE CONTROL GUNNER AND JOHN F. SUTHERLAND WAS THE TAIL GUNNER.

WE TRAINED TOGETHER FROM FEBRUARY 1944 'TIL ABOUT THE 1ST OF NEVEMBER 1944 AT SALINA, KANSAS. WHEN WE FINISHED OUR TRAINING AT SALINA, WE WENT TO HERRINGTON, KANSAS AND GOT A B-29 BOMBER WHICH WE FLEW TO CALIFORNIA AND FROM THERE TO HICKHAM FIELD, HAWAII. OUR NEXT FLIGHT TOOK US TO KWAJALEIN AND THEN TO SAIPAN.

WE LEFT THE STATES ON ARMISTICE DAY, NOVEMBER 11TH OF 1944 AND OUR FIRST MISSION OVER JAPAN WAS ON THANKSGIVING DAY 1944.

AFTER WE HAD BEEN ON SAIPAN AND FLOWN ABOUT 3 MISSIONS, A GENTLEMAN COMING DOWN THE STREET IN FRONT OF OUR QUONSET HUT WAS SALUTING ME. I DIDN'T HAVE ANY KIND OF INSIGNIA ON SO I WAS WONDERING IF THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE GUY AND AS HE GOT CLOSER, IT WAS ANDY SUKEL, MY HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL. HE WAS A SERGEANT IN THE OPERATIONS OFFICE AND HE HAD SEEN MY NAME ON THE ROSTER AS A LEUTENANT. THAT WAS THE REASON FOR THE SALUTE.

IN THE MEANTIME, IN A QUONSET HUT JUST 50 FEET AWAY WAS ANOTHER GENTLEMAN FROM MY HOMETOWN, DONALD LEE, WHOSE FATHER OWNED A RESTAURANT THERE. MY HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, MR. SUKEL, TOLD ME THERE WERE 19 BOYS FROM DONORA, PA. ON THAT ISLAND IN THE PACIFIC, WHICH IS 8,000 MILES FROM PITTSBURGH. WE WERE ALL THERE AT ONE TIME. THAT IS JUST KIND OF A RIPLEY BELIEVE IT OR NOT.

CLARENCE

HOW BIG IS THAT ISLAND?

JIM

THE ISLAND IS 2-1/2 MILES WIDE BY 5 MILES LONG. DONORA AT THAT TIME ONLY HAD A POPULATION OF 6,000 PEOPLE. OUT OF THE 19, SEVEN OF US WERE THERE INDIVIDUALLY. TWELVE OF THEM WERE THERE AS MEMBERS OF AN ANTI-AIRCRAFT UNIT. THEY HAD BEEN DRAFTED TOGETHER AND THEY STAYED TOGETHER. LATER ON, THE SERVICE DIDN'T WANT ONE TOWN TO LOSE TOO MANY PEOPLE SO THEY CUT THAT OUT.

THEN WE FLEW, PROBABLY ABOUT TEN MISSIONS. IN REALITY THE RESULTS WERE VERY POOR, VERY POOR.

CLARENCE

HOW LONG WERE THOSE MISSIONS?

JIM

APPROXIMATELY 15 HOURS. OUR FIRST MISSIONS WERE ABOVE 30,000 FEET AND BOMBING RESULTS WERE HORRIBLE. SO, THEN WE MOVED DOWN TO ABOUT 18,000 FEET AND BOMBING RESULTS WERE STILL NOT ALL THAT GOOD AND WE WERE GETTING A LOT MORE LOSSES, A LOT MORE PLANES GETTING SHOT DOWN. ABOUT THAT TIME, GEN. LeMAY WAS BROUGHT IN AS COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE 20TH AIR FORCE AND HE DECIDED ABOUT THE FIRST OF MARCH THAT WE WOULD GO IN AT 5,000 FEET OR APPROXIMATELY 5,000 TO 7,000 FEET AND FIRE BOMB FROM THAT ALTITUDE. THE FIRST FIRE RAID, APPROXIMATELY 88,000 PEOPLE DIED IN THE FIRES IN TOKYO. SINCE THEY PROVED----THE RESULTS WERE SO GOOD, MOST OF OUR MISSIONS FROM THAT TIME FORWARD, I'D SAY 75% OF OUR MISSIONS WERE FLOWN AT LOW ALTITUDE.

CLARENCE

WHY WAS THE LOW ALTITUDE SAFER THAN AT 18.000?

JIM

GOING IN AT NIGHT, ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE COULDN'T FOLLOW YOU. THERE WAS NO WAY OF HITTING YOU. THERE WERE NO NIGHT FIGHTERS.

CLARENCE

AT 18,000 FEET, YOU WERE GETTING HIT BY ANIT-AIRCRAFT FIRE?

JIM

ANTI-AIRCRAFT AND FIGHTER PLANES.

CLARENCE

FIGHTER PLANES COULD GET UP THAT HIGH?

JIM

AS I SAY, THEY HAD NO NIGHT FIGHTERS. WE HAD ONLY ONE GOOD NIGHT FIGHTER, THE P-38 AND THEY HAD NOTHING LIKE IT. THEIR FIGHTER PLANES DIDN'T HAVE RADAR OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT ON THEM. ANOTHER THING, IF THEY HAPPENED TO COME AT YOU FROM UP ABOVE, AND IF THEY WERE COMING AT VERY HIGH SPEED THEY COULD RUN INTO BUILDINGS DOWN BELOW. AT THAT ALTITUDE, THEY COULDN'T PULL OUT.

CLARENCE

OF COURSE, YOU HAD TO REMEMBER WHERE THE BIG MOUNTAIN WAS.

JIM

NO, MT. FUJIAMA WAS ABOUT 60 MILES AWAY. ACTUALLY WE USED IT AS AN INITIAL POINT. IT REALLY HAD NOTHING TO DO OTHER THAN GIVE THE NAVIGATOR AND BOMBARDIER A STARTING POINT AND STARTING OUR BOMB RUN.

CLARENCE

ON MOONLIGHT NIGHTS, COULD YOU SEE PRETTY WELL ON THE GROUND?

JIM

THE WAY THEY WOULD DO THAT ON THE FIRE RAIDS, THEY WOULD HAVE 4 PLANES THAT WERE CALLED MARKER PLANES. THEY WOULD COME IN AND DROP BOMBS AT THE FOUR EXTREMITIES, NORTH, EAST, SOUTH AND WEST AND THEN WHEN YOU COME IN FOLLOWING THAT, YOU JUST DROP THEM INSIDE THAT SPACE. ACTUALLY THERE WERE A LOT OF SEARCHLIGHTS. IT WAS ALMOST LIKE DAYLIGHT REALLY. THE ONE DRAWBACK IN THE FIRE RAIDS AND AGAIN, I DON'T KNOW WHETHER THEY COUNTED ON IT, ON THE FIRST FIRE RAID, THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 400 B-29's AND WE WERE IN ABOUT THE THIRD QUADRANT. IN OTHERS THERE WERE PROBABLY 200 PLANES THAT HAD GONE BEFORE US AND WE WERE IN THE THIRD 100 PLANES. BY THAT TIME, THE FIRES WERE COMING UP QUITE A BIT. THE SKIES WERE LIKE DAYLIGHT WITH THE FIRES AND THE SEARCHLIGHTS. IT CAUSED A HEAT THERMAL AND I THOUGHT WE HAD BEEN HIT WITH FLAK. I DIDN'T HAVE MY SEAT BELT ON AND I ENDED UP BOUNCING OFF THE ROOF OF THE PLANE. THE PILOTS LOST CONTROL OF THE PLANE---- THEY WERE STRAPPED IN BUT THEY WEREN'T EXPECTING SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

CLARENCE

THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT HAPPENED?

JIM

YES. WE WERE READY FOR IT THEN. THE FIRST TIME WE WEREN'T READY FOR IT. IT TOOK ABOUT 45 SECONDS FOR THEM TO ACTUALLY GET CONTROL OF THE PLANE. WE FLEW ALONG PROBABLY FOR 2 TO 3 MINUTES AND ALL OF A SUDDEN WE DROPPED 3,000 FEET. JUST LIKE IN AN ELEVATOR.

CLARENCE

HOW DID THE WINGS DO?

JIM

I WASN'T WATCHING THE WINGS. AS I SAY, I REALIZED WHAT HAD HAPPENED AND I THOUGHT WE GOT HIT WITH FLAK. WHEN THEY GOT CONTROL OF THE PLANE I SAID IT FELT GOOD TO FLY LEVEL FOR A WHILE, THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN, "BOOM" AGAIN BECAUSE OF THE COLD AIR AFTER THAT HEAT, WE JUST DROPPED BACK DOWN AGAIN.

CLARENCE

FIFTEEN HOURS IS A LONG PLANE RIDE, ISN'T IT?

JIM

YES

CLARENCE

THEY WERE PRESSURIZED AND HEATED?

JIM

YES, PRETTY COMFORTABLE. OTHER THAN LIKE YOU ARE STRESSED, LIKE YOUR NERVES GET BACK DOWN TO NORMAL. IT WAS A VERY COMFORTABLE PLANE.

CLARENCE

DID YOU GET HIT BY FLAK?

JIM

OH YES. WE GOT HIT ABOUT SEVEN DIFFERENT TIMES, EVEN ON THE FIRST MISSION AT 33,000 FEET, WE HAD SEVERAL HOLES IN THE WINGS. WE HAD A RAID THAT WE HAD TO GO ABOUT 100 MILES NORTH OF TOKYO TO A LITTLE TOWN CALLED OTA. JAPAN MADE PROPELLERS FOR ALL THE AIPLANES AT OTA. WE HAD MORE FIGHTER ATTACKS, PROBABLY 3 TIMES AS MANY AS WE EVER HAD BEFORE BECAUSE MOST OF OUR FLIGHTS WERE TOKYO OR KOBE OR NAGOYA OR OSAKA, WHICH WERE ALL ALMOST ON THE WATERFRONTS. IN OTHER WORDS, JUST GET IN AND BACK OUT. AT OTA, WE WENT IN 100 MILES AND THEN HAD TO GET BACK OUT SO WE HAD FIGHTER ATTACKS GOING IN AND FIGHTER ATTACKS COMING BACK. WE GOT SEVERAL HOLES IN OUR PLANE THAT DAY. IN FACT, WE HAD ONE SHELL THAT WAS UNEXPLODED AND LANDED RIGHT BELOW THE RADAR MAN'S SEAT. WE LOST PRESSURIZATION BECAUSE OF THE HOLES. THAT WAS PROBABLY THE MOST HARROWING EXPERIENCE THAT TIME.

CLARENCE

DID YOU SEE IT?

JIM

THEY WERE WORRIED ABOUT THE AIR COMING IN THE HOLES. FIRST OF ALL, EVERYONE HAD TO GET THEIR OXYGEN MASKS ON. AFTER THAT, RADAR MAN SLIZEWSKI CALLED UP AND SAID HE HAD A SHELL BACK THERE.

CLARENCE

WHAT DID THEY DO WITH IT?

JIM

I THINK THEY THREW IT OUT.

CLARENCE

SOMEBODY HAD TO GRAB THAT THING TO THROW IT OUT, BUT THEY DID DO THAT AS QUICK AS THEY COULD?

JIM

YEAH.

CLARENCE

YOU WERE HOW OLD AT THIS TIME?

JIM

I WAS 23.

CLARENCE

AND THE COMMANDER AND PILOT OF THE PLANE?

JIM

THEY WERE CLOSE TO 25 AND 26.

CLARENCE

OLD GUYS?

JIM

OLD GUYS.

CLARENCE

AND THE KIDS THAT WERE THE GUNNERS AND ALL THAT?

JIM

WE HAD ONE GUNNER WHO WAS THE BABY OF THE CREW. WHEN HE GOT WITH US HE WAS 18, SO HE WAS 19 WHEN ALL THIS HAPPENED. WE HAD A TAIL GUNNER AND HE WAS THE OLD MAN OF THE CREW, JOHN SUTHERLAND, AND HE WAS PROBABLY 31 OR 32 YEARS OLD.

CLARENCE

SO YOU DID THE FIRE BOMBING OF TOKYO. THE FIRE STORMS REALLY TOOK OFF WHEN YOU DROPPED THOSE INCENDIARIES?

JIM

YES. WELL, ACTUALLY, EVEN HAD WE NOT DROPPED THE ATOMIC BOMBS, I BELIEVE THAT THEY PROBABLY----IN FACT, JAPAN HAD ALREADY TALKED TO RUSSIA ABOUT SECURING THE PEACE FOR THEM. THEY DIDN'T WANT TO SURRENDER UNCONDITIONALLY BUT THEY WERE WILLING TO QUIT.

CLARENCE

I WAS IN TOKYO FOR THREE YEARS. I GOT TO HEAR THE JAPANESE SIDE OF THE STORY OF THE FIRE STORMS. THEY WERE SCARY.

JIM

RELATIVELY, I WENT UP TO JAPAN. I STAYED IN THE SERVICE UNTIL FEBRUARY OF 1947. IN NOVEMBER OF 1946, I WENT UP AND I SAW A LOT OF THE DAMAGE WE HAD DONE. IN FACT, WHEN I WENT UP THERE IN '46, WE LANDED AT TACHIKAWA AIRPORT. THAT WAS ONE OF OUR BOMBING MISSIONS DURING THE WAR SO I GOT TO SEE FIRST HAND A LOT OF THE DAMAGE WE HAD DONE.

CLARENCE

THAT BIG WIND TUNNEL WAS STILL THERE WHEN I GOT THERE IN '67 INTACT. I INTERRUPTED YOU. YOU DID YOUR FIRST MISSIONS IN NOVEMBER AROUND THANKSGIVING , 1944 AND THEN CONTINUED ON TO SAIPAN? DID YOU MOVE UP AS WE CONQUERED MORE LAND OR DID YOU JUST FLY OUT OF SAIPAN?

JIM

THE WHOLE TIME, WE FLEW OUT OF SAIPAN. EVERY TEN MISSIONS WE FLEW, THEY WOULD GIVE US A WEATHER MISSION AS KIND OF A REWARD AND AIR TIME AS A MISSION. EVERYONE WAS TRYING TO GET WEATHER MISSIONS AND THE ONE WE GOT WAS PROBABLY ONE OF THE MOST HECTIC OF ALL OF OUR MISSIONS. ON THIS ONE WE FLEW OUT OF SAIPAN AND WE WERE SUPPOSED TO GET THE WEATHER, FLYING OVER TO HONSHU AND THEN BACK DOWN TO SAIPAN. AS WE WERE HEADED FOR OKINAWA, OUR CRUISING ALTITUDE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ABOUT 20,000 FEET. ABOUT AN HOUR OUT OF SAIPAN, WE RAN INTO HEAVY CLOUDS. WE COULDN'T SEE ANYTHING BUT WE COULD HEAR AMERICANS TALKING ON THE RADIO, LIKE ON OUR INTERCOM. WE FLEW, I GUESS, 30 MINUTES AND ALL OF A SUDDEN HERE COMES F4U CORSAIRS, NAVY CORSAIRS UNDER OUR WINGS. THEY CALLED OVER AND A NAVY MAN SAID WE WERE NOT SENDING OUT OUR UHF SIGNALS. THE RADIOMAN LOOKED AT HIS EQUIPMENT AND SAID, "YEAH, IT'S SENDING. THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WRONG SOMEPLACE."

CLARENCE

THESE 4 GUYS HAD NO IDEA-----

JIM

NO IDEA. WE LOOKED DOWN BELOW AND THERE WAS ABOUT 2/3RDS OF TASK FORCE 58. CHESTER NIMITZ WAS DOWN THERE. THE CODE NAME FOR HIS SHIP WAS "TEXAS BASE" AND SO

THE CORSAIR PILOTS CALLED DOWN AND SAID, "TEXAS BASE, TEXAS BASE WE'VE GOT A FRIENDLY MONSTER UP HERE, LET 'EM GO."

CLARENCE

DID THEY START TO GET A BEAD ON YOU? THEY CAME UP TO GET YOU, DID THEY?

JIM

OH YES. THEY WOULD HAVE SHOT US DOWN. THEY DIDN'T KNOW WHO WE WERE. OF COURSE, THEY WAITED UNTIL WE GOT OUT OF THE CLOUDS. THEN WE FLEW A LITTLE BIT FURTHER ON AND THEN WE SAW ABOUT 300 MORE SHIPS DOWN BELOW. THAT WAS THE REST OF TASK FORCE 58. THEY STAYED WITH US AND RADIOED DOWN AND SAID, "RANGER BASE, RANGER BASE, WE HAVE FRIENDLY MONSTER UP HERE, LET HIM GO. "

THEN, WHEN WE GOT UP TO OKINAWA, THERE WERE 2 JAPANESE PLANES----WE WERE UP ABOUT 20-22,000 FEET AND THEY JUST STAYED AT ABOUT 15,000 FEET AND KIND OF FOLLOWED US OR STAYED RIGHT WITH US UNTIL WE GOT UP TO KYUSHU WHICH IS THE SOUTHERN MOST ISLAND OF JAPAN AND THEN THEY LEFT US THERE. THEN WE FLEW OVER TO HONSHU. IN THE MEANTIME, RIGHT UP BY KYUSHU, WE LOST AN ENGINE. WE DECIDED SINCE WE WERE THAT FAR, WE WENT ON TO HONSHU AND WHEN WE GOT THERE, WE LOST ANOTHER ENGINE SO WE DECIDED WE WOULD LAND AT IWO JIMA. NOW, THIS WAS ON MARCH 17, ST. PATRICK'S DAY, AND THERE WAS STILL FIGHTING GOING ON UP ON THE NORTH END OF IWO JIMA. IT WAS ACTUALLY SECURED ON MARCH 19. THERE WAS STILL A LITTLE BIT OF FIGHTING ON THE NORTH END. DOWN WHERE WE LANDED, THERE WAS VERY LITTLE FIGHTING. WE LANDED AND WE HAD TO LEAVE OUR PLANE THERE BECAUSE 2 ENGINES WERE GONE AND THEY HAD NO WAY OF DOING ANY REPAIRS ANY TIME SOON. WE WENT UP TO THE FLIGHT LINE TO GET AN ATC PLANE BACK TO SAIPAN. WE SPLIT UP INTO TWO GROUPS. THE PILOT WANTED TO STAY WITH THE PLANE UNTIL HE GOT CLEARANCE ON WHAT TO DO FROM THE HOME BASE.

I TOOK FOUR OTHER MEN WITH ME AND WE SAT DOWN ON A BENCH WAITING ON AN ATC PLANE AND HERE CAME A TALL GUY ABOUT 6 FOOT THREE. HE LOOKED DOWN AND SAID, "DID YOU JUST GET IN?" I SAID, "NO, WE GOT IN YESTERDAY." I LOOKED UP AND HE HAD ABOUT 3 STARS ON HIS SHOULDER. IT WAS "HOWLING MAD" SMITH, THE MARINE GENERAL. I SAID, "I MEAN SIR, WE JUST---." HE SAID, "FORGET ABOUT IT. WE'RE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT."

CLARENCE

COULD YOU HEAR THE FIRING DOWN THERE?

JIM

AT NIGHT, THEY WOULD FIRE PHOSPHOROUS SHELLS. THEY WOULD JUST LIGHT UP THE SKY. THERE WASN'T ANY FIGHTING ANYWHERE NEAR US, JUST ON THE VERY NORTHERN TIP. TWO DAYS LATER THEY DECLARED THE ISLAND SECURE.

CLARENCE

DID THEY KILL EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM?

JIM

ON SAIPAN, THEY HAD A CAMP, CALLED CAMP SUSUPE WHERE ALL THE PRISONERS WERE. MOST OF THEM WERE WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THERE WERE SOME MEN. ON IWO JIMA, I SAW A BARBED WIRE ENCAMPMENT WHERE THERE WERE ONLY TWO PRISONERS. I ASKED ONE MARINE, "WHERE ARE THE REST OF THE PRISONERS?" HE SAID, "WE HAVE ALL WE WANTED HERE."

CLARENCE

THEN, YOU CAUGHT A RIDE BACK TO SAIPAN? ABOUT YOUR AIRCRAFT. DID THEY EVER GET IT?

JIM

FIRST OF ALL, THE AIRCRAFT WE FLEW THAT DAY WAS V SQUARE 21. OUR PLANE WAS V SQUARE 27. THIS V SQUARE 21 HAD HAD PRIOR DAMAGE AND THAT WAS ONE REASON THAT THEY TOOK IT ON WEATHER MISSIONS. OUR PLANE, SOMEONE ELSE WAS FLYING ON A MISSION THAT DAY SO WE TOOK OUR PLANE AND FINISHED FORMATION.

CLARENCE

DID THEY PUSH 21 OFF THE RUNWAY AND INTO THE WATER?

JIM

THEY DIDN'T HAVE THE FACILITIES TO FIX THE PLANES BACK THERE.

CLARENCE

WHAT DID THEY DO WITH THEM?

JIME

THEY MIGHT HAVE SET THEM ASIDE UNTIL LATER ON WHENEVER---FIRST OF ALL, YOU NEED A BIGGER RUNWAY. THE RUNWAYS ON THE SOUTH FIELD WERE ONLY ABOUT 4,000 FEET LONG. A B-29, YOU COULD GET IT IN THE AIR ON A 4,000 FOOT RUNWAY IF YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY BOMBS AND NOT TOO MUCH GAS.

CLARENCE

FULLY LOADED?

JIM

FULLY LOADED, YOU NEEDED ABOUT 8500 FEET. AND YOU USED EVERY BIT OF IT.

CLARENCE

YOUR MILK RUN MISSION TURNED OUT THAT YOU WERE ALMOST SHOT DOWN BY YOUR OWN PEOPLE, LOST TWO ENGINES AND THEN HAD TO GO TO IWO JIMA WHERE THERE WAS STILL FIGHTING. HOW MANY MISSIONS HAD YOU COMPLETED AT THAT TIME?

JIM

AT THAT TIME, I THINK 20.

CLARENCE

HOW MUCH DID YOU HAVE TO HAVE TO GO HOME?

JIM

THIRTY.

CLARENCE

SO YOU HAD TEN MORE TO GO. YOU HAD AN UNEXPLODED SHELL IN ONE OF YOUR MISSIONS. THEN YOU FLEW ALL OF YOUR MISSIONS OUT OF SAIPAN?

JIM

RIGHT. OUR LAST MISSION WAS JUNE 7TH. 1945.

CLARENCE

WHAT WAS YOUR IMPRESSION OF WHAT WAS GOING ON? DID YOU KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE WHOLE THEATER KIND OF THING? DID THEY KEEP YOU PRETTY WELL ADVISED?

JIM

WE KNEW PRETTY WELL WHAT WAS GOING ON WITHIN OUR OWN BOMB WING. AT THAT TIME, THEY WERE CONTEMPLATING DROPPING THE ATOM BOMB, WE DIDN'T HAVE INKLING OF THAT.

CLARENCE

THAT WAS PRETTY QUIET?

JIM

YEAH.

CLARENCE

SO, YOU FINISHED YOUR 30 MISSIONS IN JUNE. WHAT HAPPENED THEN?

JIM

I CAME HOME. I REPORTED TO GREENSBORO, N.C. AND THERE AGAIN WAS AN ODDITY LIKE WHEN YOU CAME BACK, YOU HAD TO TAKE A 64, WHICH IS LIKE A FULL PHYSICAL TO MAKE SURE YOUR VITALS WERE MOVING. AS I WAS GETTING READY TO TAKE MY EYE TEST, THE FELLOW PUSHED THIS MACHINE AND I PUSHED IT BACK AND HERE WAS ANOTHER BOY FROM DONORA, PA. HIS NAME WAS MELVIN CHARLES. HIS FATHER OWNED A JEWELRY STORE IN DONORA. HE HAD BEEN DRAFTED. HE WAS ALREADY STUDYING TO BE AN EYE DOCTOR.

CLARENCE

HOW WAS IT, YOU CAME OUT OF THE THEATER OF WAR AND ALL OF A SUDDEN YOU LAND IN THE UNITED STATES. WHAT WAS THE CONTRAST LIKE?

JIM

WHEN I FIRST GOT BACK, THE WAR WAS STILL ON FOR THE FIRST FEW MONTHS. I FIGURED THAT I MIGHT HAVE TO GO BACK OVERSEAS. THEY WERE NOT GOING TO TAKE A NEW PERSON AND HAVE TO TRAIN HIM.

CLARENCE

WERE THERE A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO DID TWO STINTS?

JIM

WELL, YES. A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO HAD FINISHED UP THEIR TOUR IN EUROPE CAME OVER TO THE PACIFIC.

CLARENCE

THAT 30 MISSIONS IN EUROPE WAS JUST FOR EUROPE?

JIM

A LOT OF THEM FLEW 50 MISSIONS. SEE, THE MISSIONS IN EUROPE, GOING ACROSS THE CHANNEL MAYBE AND HOUR AND A HALF, MAYBE TWO HOURS.

CLARENCE

SO YOU FLEW MOSTLY THESE BOMBING MISSIONS FROM SAIPAN, THEN CAME HOME. WHAT DID YOU DO FOR THE COUPLE OF MONTHS THAT YOU WERE STILL IN?

JIM

I REPORTED TO ELLINGTON FIELD IN HOUSTON. ACTUALLY I HAD A PERSONNEL JOB THERE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AND THAT IS WHERE I MET MY WIFE. WE GOT ENGAGED AND I WAS TRANSFERRED FROM HOUSTON TO RANDOLPH FIELD IN SAN ANTONIO. I STAYED THERE FOR A SHORT WHILE THEN WAS TRANSFERRED TO BARKSDALE FIELD IN SHREVEPORT. WE GOT MARRIED IN HOUSTON TEXAS IN 1946 AND LIVED IN SHREVEPORT, LA., WHILE I WAS STATIONED AT BARKSDALE FIELD. ABOUT 3 MONTHS LATER, IN SEPTEMBER, I WAS TRANSFERRED TO GUAM, WITHOUT MY WIFE.

CLARENCE

YOU FELT GOOD ABOUT THAT, HUH?

JIM

I HAD BEEN ON GUAM NO MORE THAN ABOUT TEN DAYS OR MAYBE TWO WEEKS AND A TYPHOON HIT GUAM ON SEPTEMBER 22ND. WINDS WERE PRETTY CLOSE TO AROUND 200 MILES AN HOUR. IN SOME OF THE QUONSET HUTS WE WERE LIVING IN, IT JUST BLEW THEM UP IN THE AIR LIKE BOX KITES. THE ONLY PERMANENT BUILDING WE HAD IN OUR PROXIMITY WAS OUR OFFICERS CLUB, WHICH WAS BUILT OF CONCRETE. I WENT OVER THERE AND SPENT THE NIGHT AND THE NEXT MORNING I GOT WORD FROM OPERATIONS THAT I WAS TO COME OVER TO OPERATIONS AND FOUND OUT THAT I WAS GOING TO BE THE NAVIGATOR ON A CREW TO TRACK THAT TYPHOON. WE FLEW ABOUT 3 HOURS THEN WE GOT UP TO THE TYPHOON AND THE BOTTOM OF IT WAS ABOUT 700 FEET OVER THE OCEAN. THE WAVES DOWN BELOW LOOKED LIKE THEY WOULD COME UP 60 OR 70 FEET. WE HAD TO FLY LIKE THAT FOR ABOUT 4 HOURS. AERONAUTICS WILL TELL THAT THE WINGS ARE FLAPPING ON AN AIRPLANE BUT THIS WAS VERY VISIBLE. YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO RELY ON THEM TELLING YOU THAT, YOU COULD SEE IT. MY COMPASS WAS JUMPING 60-70 DEGREES, NEVER STOPPING. THE REASON WE WERE TRACKING IT, WAS TO DETERMINE WHETHER IT WAS GOING TO HIT THE PHILIPPINES OR OKINAWA. IF IT WAS GOING TO GO TO OKINAWA THEY WERE GOING TO TRANSFER THE PLANES DOWN TO CLARK FIELD IN THE PHILIPPINES AND VICE VERSA. WHEN WE DETERMINED IT WAS GOING TO OKINAWA, WE LANDED AT CLARK FIELD IN THE PHILIPPINES. LATER WE FOUND OUT THAT SO MANY RIVETS HAD COME LOOSE ON OUR AIRPLANE WE HAD TO GET ANOTHER AIRPLANE TO FLY BACK TO GUAM.

CLARENCE

THE IS STILL IN A B-29?

JIM

YES.

CLARENCE

I WAS THERE FOR 2 YEARS AND NEVER HIT A TYPHOON. WE DID FLY AROUND ONE. IT WAS 50,000 FEET HIGH OR SOMETHNG LIKE THAT. DO THEY GO VERY HIGH?

JIM

OH YEAH.

CLARENCE

YOU DID THAT AND HOW LONG YOU SAID-----?

JIM

WELL, THEN ABOUT JANUARY I WAS PROMOTED TO CAPTAIN. I FOUND OUT THAT I COULD GET OUT OF THE SERVICE. FIRST OF ALL I FOUND OUT IT WOULD BE 1-1/2 YEARS BEFORE I COULD GET MY WIFE OVER TO GUAM. I DECIDED I WOULD GET OUT OF THE SERVICE. I GOT BACK IN FEBRUARY OF 1947. I WAS DISCHARGED IN FEBRUARY 1947.

MY AWARDS INCLUDE THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS, THE AIR MEDAL WITH THREE OAK LEAF CLUSTERS, AND THE ASIATIC CAMPAIGN MEDAL.

CLARENCE

YOU STAYED IN HOUSTON?

JIM

STAYED IN HOUSTON.

CLARENCE

THE PENNSYLVANIA WIDOWS WERE GOOD FOR PENNSYLVANIA, BUT NO (GARBLED)

JIM

NO, THE REASON WAS, WHEN I GOT OUT OF THE SERVICE, MY WIFE MET ME IN CHICAGO AND I LOVED CHICAGO WHEN I WAS IN THE SERVICE. I HAD EVERY INTENTION OF SETTLING DOWN THERE. WHEN I LEFT GUAM ON ABOUT FEBRUARY 5TH, IT WAS 90 DEGREES, BECAUSE IT IS 90 DEGREES ON GUAM JUST ABOUT EVERY DAY OF THE YEAR. WHEN WE GOT IN CHICAGO AND MY WIFE MET ME, IT WAS 8 BELOW ZERO. SHE SAID, "THERE IS NO WAY I'M GOING TO LIVE HERE."

CLARENCE

SO YOU MOVED DOWN TO HOUSTON. WHAT KIND OF WORK DID YOU GET INTO?

JIM

I FIRST STARTED OUT IN THE WORKING FOR EASTERN AIRLINES IN THE RESERVATIONS DEPARTMENT. THEN I GOT IN THE LUMBER BUSINESS. THAT IS WHAT I SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE IN. I HAVE 4 CHILDREN, 10 GRANDCHILDREN, and 2 GREAT GRANDCHILDREN.

CLARENCE

STILL HAVE YOUR WIFE?

JIM

STILL HAVE MY WIFE.

CLARENCE

YOU BOTH ENJOY GOOD HEALTH I HOPE?

JIM

YES.

CLARENCE

YOU LOOK GREAT. HOW OLD ARE YOU NOW?

JIM

I'LL BE 82 NEXT MARCH, 2003.

CLARENCE

WHAT DO YOU EAT? I WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU'RE EATING. THAT GOOD WIFE IS KEEPING YOU IN GOOD SHAPE.

JIM

YES, SHE DOES THAT. THEY SAY LIFE BEGINS AT FORTY. IN MY CASE, IT IS BEGUN AT 80. ON JANUARY 11, 2000, I MADE 2 HOLES IN ONE, IN ONE ROUND OF GOLF.

CLARENCE

YOU'RE KIDDING. HOW MUCH DID IT COST YOU? WERE YOU PLAYING WITH FRIENDS.

JIM

ON YEAH. YOU HAVE TO BUY THE DRINKS. OF COURSE, THEY HAVE A HOLE IN ONE CLUB AT BRAEBURN COUNTRY CLUB, SO I WON ABOUT \$1,100 FROM THE HOLE IN ONE CLUB.

CLARENCE

IS THERE A FLYING B-29 LEFT ANYPLACE?

JIM

"FIFI". THERE IS ONE B-29 STILL FLYING.

CLARENCE

WHERE IS THAT B-29 NOW?

JIM

I DON'T KNOW. IT GOES TO A LOT OF CONFEDERATE AIRFORCE AIR SHOWS AND THAT IS LOCATED IN MIDLAND, TEXAS. I DON'T KNOW WHETHER THAT IS THEIR PERMENANT BASE OR NOT.

CLARENCE

YOU KNOW, THEY PUT ONE AT LACKLAND THIS PAST YEAR.

JIM

BUT IT DOESN'T FLY. THEY HAVE ONE I BELIEVE IN SPOKANE AND ONE OTHER ONE . THEY HAVE 3 OR 4 OF THEM. IN FACT, OUT OF TUSCON, AZ. THEY HAVE ONE THAT LOOKS LIKE IT JUST CAME OFF THE ASSEMBLY LINE.

CLARENCE

WE ARE VERY PRIVILEGED TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO RECORD MR. O'DONNEL'S EXPERIENCES. AND WE FORMALLY THANK HIM.

JIM

I SAID, WE HAD A CREW OF ELEVEN AND WHEN YOU ARE FLYING ANYWHERE BETWEEN 1500 AND 1800 MILES OVER WATER EACH WAY, EVERYBODY HAD TO KNOW THEIR BUSINESS. WHEN YOU GOT OVER THE TARGET YOU HAD TO RELY ON THE GUNNERS WHO WERE ENLISTED MEN JUST AS MUCH AS THEY HAD TO RELY ON THE PILOT AND THE NAVIGATOR TO GET THEM THERE AND BACK. IT WAS REALLY TEAMWORK THAT ENABLED US TO SUCCEED. WE ARE STILL LIKE BROTHERS.

CLARENCE

THE B-29 TOOK A LOT FUEL ON TAKEOFF DIDN'T IT?

JIM

WHEN WE FIRST FLEW UP TO 33,000 FEET, THERE AGAIN, THE B-29 HAD CAPACITY TO CARRY TEN TONS OF BOMBS BUT WHEN YOU WENT TO 33,000 FEET WE COULD ONLY CARRY ABOUT 2-1/2 TONS OF BOMBS BECAUSE WE HAD TO CARRY AN EXTRA TANK IN THE BOMB BAY WHICH HELD 8,000 GALLONS. WHEN YOU CLIMBED TO ALTITUDE, IT USES LOTS OF GAS. BUT NOW, ON THE FIRE RAIDS, WHEN YOU DON' EVEN GET OVER 7,000 FEET ALL THE WAY FROM

SAIPAN ALL THE WAY UP TO JAPAN, DROP YOUR BOMBS AND THEN COME BACK, YOU COULD CARRY TEN TONS OF BOMBS.

CLARENCE

SO YOU FLEW THE WHOLE ROUTE AT THAT KIND OF ALTITUDE?

JIM

YES. THERE WAS NO REASON FOR GOING HIGHER.

CLARENCE

YOUR EFFICIENCY WAS JUST AS GOOD AT 5,000 FEET?

JIM

ACTUALLY, YOU'RE BEST BET COMING BACK TO SAIPAN TO SAVE GAS, WAS 18,000 FEET. BUT, IF YOU WERE UP AT 18,000 FEET, YOU WERE BUCKING THE WINDS. RELATIVELY, YOU DIDN'T HAVE ANY CLIMBING TO DO IF YOU STAYED AT 7,000 FEET.

END OF TAPE

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