

ADMIRAL NIMITZ MUSEUM
AND
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

1272

Interview with

ADMIRAL J. LLOYD ABBOT, JR.

March 14, 1998

Place of Interview: Fredericksburg, Texas

Interviewer: William J. Alexander

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Mr. Alexander: This is Bill Alexander. We're in Fredericksburg, Texas, and we'll be doing the oral history of Admiral J. L. Abbot, Jr.

Admiral, thank you very much. I'd like to start by asking you where you were born, and when?

Adm. Abbot: I was born in Mobile, Alabama, on June 26, 1918.

Mr. Alexander: Your parents were...?

Adm. Abbot: Each of my parents was also born in Mobile, Alabama. My dad was James Lloyd Abbot, born on September 15, 1888. My mother, Helen Buck Taylor--her maiden name--was born on, I believe, October 20, 1891. Both of them were born in Mobile.

Mr. Alexander: That means that their parents had been in Mobile for a period of time--your grandparents.

Adm. Abbot: Well, in my dad's case, no. His father was born in Boston [Massachusetts]. He was also named

James Lloyd Abbot. He came down to Mobile in the latter half of the of the Eighteenth Century as a cotton broker and settled in Mobile, and he met and married a Mobile belle. But my mother's parents lived in Mobile. They were not both born in Mobile. Her name was Helen Buck Taylor. Her father was R. V. Taylor; her mother was named named Helen Buck. She was the daughter of Colonel William Amos Buck of the Confederate Army, who commanded the Mobile Regiment.

Alexander: Oh, really!

Abbot: In the War Between the States, yes, sir. As a matter of fact, on my father's side [of the family], his mother's father was Major Wiillam H. Ross, who was Colonel Buck's...and they called it the "commissary," like, supply officer, in the Mobile Regiment. So, I had two great-grandfathers in the Mobile Regiment.

Alexander: In the Mobile Regiment, fighting in the "big war" [American Civil War].

Alexander: All right, sir. Thank you. Did you go to school, then, when you grew up, in the grade schools and high schools of Mobile?

Abbot: Yes. I went to grade school out in the country. I was at Goff School first in the first grade, where we had one teacher with seven grades in two rooms. Then I moved to what was called a consolidated school. This had one room per grade--Baker School. Finally,

in the seventh grade, I moved into downtown Mobile. They had in the old Barton Academy all of the seventh grades in Mobile County. It was sort of like a junior high school. Then I went to Murphy High School in Mobile, where I graduated with the Class of 1934.

Alexander: Outstanding.

Abbot: Then I went to one year at Spring Hill College, which is a Jesuit school in Mobile. Although I had an appointment to attend the United States Naval Academy [Annapolis, Maryland], I did not meet the minimum age requirement [for enrolling there]. You may or may not know that in those days in Alabama, they only had eleven grades, not twelve.

Alexander: Oh, I see.

Abbot: So, then I did go off to the Naval Academy after one year at Spring Hill. I graduated in 1939.

Alexander: From the Naval Academy.

Abbot: From the Naval Academy. I was graduated and commissioned on 1 June 1939. Is that all that you needed? Do you need anything about postgraduate work?

Alexander: Yes. Did you do postgraduate work at that time?

Abbot: Yes. Well, I didn't do any of that for a long time, but eventually I did when I was at the Armed Forces Staff College. I think that was in, like, 1951, I believe. [Referring to and gesturing toward personal documents] This is in that paper that I've been

telling about that will give us that information. This was about a six-month school, as you may well know. Then I was a student at the National War College. That class was the Class of 1964 at the National War College, and I went to night school at George Washington University [Washington, D.C.] during that time, and I got a master's in business administration in conjunction, kind of, with the War College.

Alexander: That was really your master's degree then.

Abbot: Yes, sir.

Alexander: In 1939, where did they send you first?

Abbot: My first ship was the USS Enterprise, CV-6.

Alexander: Wow!

Abbot: In fact, the reason...I know that you don't want this interview to be too detailed. My first cousin had gone two years ahead of me--in 1937--to the Lexington. If you remember, that was one of the two...

Alexander: The first Lexington.

Abbot: That's right. The Saratoga and Lexington were sister ships.

He wrote to me and said, "Listen." I had wanted to go to a carrier because I wanted to fly airplanes. He said, "You get aboard, and you go see the executive officer and tell him that you want to be assistant navigator." I did that, and I got the job; and it is

the best job for an ensign because you're up there in the charthouse, and you know what's going on. Your battle station is on the bridge as junior officer-of-the-deck.

So, I was assistant navigator of the Enterprise, but it only for lasted two months, really--July and August of 1939. See, [Nazi German Chancellor Adolph] Hitler moved on Poland, and I got message orders to go back to the East Coast and pull a [World War I-vintage] four-stack destroyer out of the back channel and put her back in commission.

Alexander: You were an ensign.

Abbot: Yes, sir, I was an ensign.

Alexander: And you were going to go get a "four-stacker" and get her ready to go.

Abbot: Yes, sir, as a member of her crew.

Alexander: Okay.

Abbot: I was number six. We had a skipper, an "exec" [executive officer], and so on. I was the low [junior] man. They called them "George" in the wardroom. I was the low man.

We did put her in commission. We took her down to Norfolk [Virginia] for homeporting. We stayed on Gilmer [DD-233] for, oh, more than a year-and-a-half. It was a "four-stacker." We took her on around through the [Panama] Canal and up to Seattle

[Washington] to homeport there.

I went from there to flight training at Pensacola [Naval Air Station, Florida] in, like, March of 1941.

Alexander: You applied, obviously.

Abbot: Oh, Lord, I'd been applying every month (chuckle), but the average officer was not allowed to go to flight training until he had been at sea on a ship for two years. So, nominally, then, I couldn't have gotten to flight training until June, 1941, and I made it a couple of months early and got on down to Pensacola.

Alexander: Very good.

Abbot: I got my wings in Miami [Florida] in November, 1941, just before [the December 7, 1941, Japanese attack at] Pearl Harbor.

Alexander: What planes were you flying?

Abbot: Well, the N3N, "The Yellow Peril," in Pensacola; the O3U biplane; the SU biplane; the SNJ, which they called the T-6 in the Air Corps. All of that was at Pensacola. Then at Miami, which was advanced training...

Alexander: Was it at Opa-locka [Florida]?

Abbot: Opa-locka, yes.

Alexander: That was my old base.

Abbot: Is that right? Well, you know it well, then--great layout for a field.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: They were service-type airplanes, sort of hand-me-downs from the fleet. So, for fighters we had F2Fs, F3Fs. We had F3F1s, F3F2s, and F3F3s. I don't know whether you remember those. That was a little biplane fighter, you know.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: They had retractable [landing] gears. The F3F1 had a twin row engine--a Pratt and Whitney--but the F3F2s and F3F3s had what they called the "Big Wright" engines--the [model] R-1820. They really could perform. I always thought that they were the most fun to fly of any airplane that I'd ever flown. My predecessor [speaking in a presentation at the March 14, 1998, session of the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium] said, "No, there was an airplane called the F4B that was just a few years earlier that was the most fun." It has been a source of regret to me that I never got to fly the F4B.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: But in Miami we had the BT, which was sort of the predecessor of the SBD. That was built by Northrop. It had split flaps with holes in them [for air braking when dive-bombing], so it was the same technology.

Alexander: It was a dive-bomber.

Abbot: It was an excellent dive-bomber. Then we had the SBC3 and SBC4. The SBC3 had a retractable [landing] gear.

It took fifty-seven turns [on the ratchet handle] to get the gear up.

Alexander: I remember that.

Abbot: The SBC4 had a hydraulic gear. That was a step up.

Alexander: (Chuckle) Unless you lost your hydraulic fluid.

Abbot: Then we had SNJs, too, for instrument training.

Alexander: Oh, really. You didn't use them for combat training?

Abbot: No. Oh, no. For gunnery training, we used the fighters. In other words, when we'd go out on a gunnery "hop" [mission], we were in an F2F or F3F. No, the SNJs were for instrument training.

Alexander: All right.

Abbot: Then from there I was ordered to ACTG, Pacific, San Diego [California]. That means Advanced Carrier Training Group (Pacific). There were two of them. One was in San Diego, and one was in Norfolk. I mentioned this today [reference to Admiral Abbot's presentation at the March 14, 1998, session of the Admiral Nimitz Museum Symposium] that they were really the source of a lot of the hard core of pilots in the fleet at the beginning of World War II. They had been in existence for a long number of months, and their training, in my opinion, was superb. They, if you want to say so, were the forerunners of "Top Gun" School [Miramar, California].

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Abbot: In other words, it was that step between advanced training and the [being assigned to duty with the] fleet. The only problem was that they really didn't have enough airplanes. See, at ACTG you had a little more up-to-date airplanes. You had F4Fs for fighters--mostly F4F3s. Eventually, we began to get F4F4s. You had SBDs, and they were SBD3s, of course. But, you know, the SBDs were all a lot alike, even all the way up to the SBD5.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: They were superb dive-bombers.

Alexander: I should say.

Abbot: I had some troubles that caused me to stay a long time at ACTG. For example, on a night in February, 1942, I was coming back on a night "hop." You may recall that we had blackouts in those days.

Alexander: Oh, yes. You bet.

Abbot: Yes. I landed this SNJ...I never remembered any part of this, but they said that I landed a little long [too far down the runway], and they heard me give it a little burst of gun [to correct heading] if I was to correct it. I hit a P-38 head-on in the left engine. The P-38 was tied down for the night.

Alexander: Oh, then you're on land. You're not on a carrier.

Abbot: Oh, no. Yes, this was at North Island [California].

Alexander: Oh, at North Island.

Abbot: That's where ACTG was. ACTG was at North island. So, anyhow, they came out and got me in an ambulance. In those days there were no shoulder straps. You just had seatbelts, so the impact had pivoted most of me around my seatbelt [Admiral Abbot slapping his hands]. See, it pivoted me forward so that my head and face hit the stick and the dashboard. But it also got my head down because the wing of the P-38 cut the overturn structure behind my head like it was butter.

Alexander: PSHEEEEEEW! Wow!

Abbot: So, when they got out there in the ambulance, the highest thing in the airplane was my head and shoulders sitting up. I was "out like a light" [unconscious], but I was sitting up. (Chuckle) That was the highest thing in the airplane.

Alexander: (Chuckle) Golly!

Abbot: So, I was very, very fortunate. In fact, I was so fortunate that...although there were no shoulder belts in those days, once we got shoulder belts, brother, I pulled them tight.

Alexander: Boy, I'll bet that you did.

Abbot: Yes. In fact, I regained consciousness on the way into sickbay. Some young doctor was in the ambulance, and my nose was over here under my left eye [gesture]. He tried to straighten the nose out, and [the pain associated with] that brought me to [returned Admiral

Abbot to consciousness] (chuckle).

Alexander: Gee, I would think so.

Abbot: They took me over to the hospital at San Diego, and I spent quite awhile there. I spent six or eight weeks in the hospital. They did a sub-mucous resuction, they call it.

Alexander: Yes, I've had one of those.

Abbot: After that healed down, the guy came in to do the plastic [surgery] work, to get the nose back in the middle of my face. He cut a piece of a lady's old rib cartilage and put it on this side [gesture]. Then he put an aluminum brace on it. Then you've got to wait several weeks. Finally, the day came--the unveiling, you see. He took the brace off, and I don't know whether you're cleared for this, but he said, "Oh, shit!"

Alexander: (Chuckle) We're cleared for it.

Abbot: (Chuckle) I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "It's not right." I said, "Just a minute, Doctor! I can breathe through it, and I can smell with it. We're through!" And we were, and it's been very satisfactory ever since.

Alexander: (Chuckle) It's been your buddy all of this time.

Abbot: That's right. (Chuckle) I don't care if it isn't right. It's good enough for me.

Alexander: (Chuckle) Boy, I guess so.

Abbot: So, meanwhile, you see, this delays me in ACTG. I forget who it was out there. [General Robert E.] Bob Galer was telling us [in another Admiral Nimitz Museum/University of North Texas Oral History Program oral history interview] about how sometimes the "Man Upstairs" is looking out for you. I had orders in my hand all of this time on [predicated upon] the completion of ACTG. I was supposed to go to VT-6-- Torpedo 6--aboard the Enterprise. Well, that little expedition to the P-38 knocked that out, and, in retrospect, I think that if I had gone [to VT-6], I'd have been one of the casualties at Midway, see.

Alexander: I see.

Abbot: So, then I go back to ACTG and start flying again, and my orders got changed [to being assigned] to VF-6-- Fighting 6, still on the Enterprise. So, as summer goes on, the next problem that I had...

Alexander: Now, when is this?

Abbot: This is 1942. This year is still 1942.

Alexander: This is still in 1942, but it's after the Battle of Midway?

Abbot: Yes, that's right. In fact, Jimmy Thach came back after the Battle of Midway and talked to us at ACTG.

That summer I developed some asthma symptoms-- pretty bad attacks of asthma. I had a young doctor, who was a friend of mine. I was trying to conceal it.

He gave me a shot of ammanopholine (?). I don't know if you've ever heard of that or not. Anyhow, it was a jolt, but it stopped that asthma attack. Eventually, it was almost debilitating, so it came to light, and they ordered me back over to the hospital. They ordered me to appear before what is called a Board of Medical Survey. That's bad!

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: That's bad! I think that there were two things that kept me from really just...well, I don't think that it would have ended my Navy career, but I think that it would have ended my flying career. One thing was that they needed warm bodies that could fly airplanes. They needed that. The second thing was that there was a doctor there--the "bull" [senior Navy] doctor on the West Coast--Rear-Admiral Edgar Woods, whom I had known when he was senior medical officer at the Naval Academy. He was a medical school classmate of my uncle's--my Uncle Adrian. And I think that the combination of those two things kept me from getting a "down" [reference to a "thumbs down" gesture from the board that would indicate being grounded from active duty flying]. The Board of Medical Survey said that I could fly all right, but I wasn't allowed to fly carrier airplanes. That was a big blow, but I was still flying.

Then I got ordered to VS-1D-14. That was an inshore patrol squadron. They really began forming those in late 1941. They were shore-based antisubmarine squadrons. They flew the OS2U airplane, both on floats [seaplanes] and on wheels [land-based aircraft]. I reported down to Pago Pago [American Samoa] to VS-1D-14 in the South Pacific. The squadron was then moved over to British Samoa. Have you ever been over there?

Alexander: No.

Abbot: That's where Oliver Wendell Holmes, I think, spent a lot of his time--over there. But, anyhow, they had their OS2Us over there on floats. They had ramps that the SeaBees [CBs, Navy Construction Battalions] had built and a little camp on the side. They flew patrols out of there.

By the time that I got there, which was in December of 1942, the squadron [headquarters] had been moved to British Samoa. They had a detachment at Wallis Island and another detachment at Funafuti.

So, after being at the main squadron for only about three or four weeks, I was sent up to be officer-in-charge of the Wallis detachment. I had, by the way, made [been promoted to] lieutenant back in June of 1942, so I was a "two-stripper" [reference to uniform insignia device] by now, and, really, I guess,

I was about the fourth senior man in the squadron. We had the skipper, Clayton Miller; the "exec" [executive officer], Bill Eady; and the next guy was Hank Haselton out of '38 [reference to the United States Naval Academy graduating Class of 1938]; and I was number four. Another classmate of mine, "Robbie" Robinson, was in the squadron. So, I had the Wallis Island detachment, and I'm the O-in-C [officer-in-charge] of that.

Then I moved up to Funafuti to become officer-in-charge of the Funafuti detachment. While I was up there on Funafuti--on about the 1st of April of 1943 now, see--the "Great White Father" [Office of the Chief of Naval Operations] sent out a message saying that VS-1D-14 was hereby divided into two squadrons. One was to to be called VS-65, based at Samoa; and the other was to be called VS-66, based on Wallis Island. J. Lloyd Abbot, Jr., was to be the commanding officer of VS-66, and "Robbie" Robinson--this classmate of mine--was to be the skipper of VS-65. Well, the interesting thing about that is that I didn't find out that I was the supposed to be the commanding officer of the squadron until about a week or so after it was supposed to have happened...

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: ...because I was in Funafuti. So, I had to get busy

and get back down to Wallis and get things organized, and, indeed, we had a little [assumption of command] ceremony. I took command in April of 1943. We had a detachment at Funafuti until we were relieved. Another squadron had formed down, I think, at Efate or somewhere on farther down in the south. That meant that we consolidated this little squadron at Wallis Island. We were what you would call a self-contained squadron. We had not just pilots and gunners and radiomen to man all of the airplanes, but we also had maintenance personnel such as mechanics, ordnancemen, and we our own had cooks and bakers. We had our own mess, and we really lived pretty well there at Wallis Island.

Alexander: Did you have medical personnel as well there?

Abbot: Well, not attached to the squadron. There was a medical detachment that really belonged to the island commander, who was a Marine, and they gave us medical support. No, we did not have any medical support in the squadron. But we just continued there at Wallis flying patrols out of Wallis Island--antisubmarine patrols.

Alexander: All right, let me ask you something.

Abbot: All right.

Alexander: How many submarines did you ever see?

Abbot: (Chuckle) None! Zero!

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: We never saw a submarine.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: We had one guy who got all excited one day. I can't remember for sure whether we ever dropped a depth bomb--we carried depth bombs all the time--but, anyhow, it was really a mother whale and her baby whale. We got that figured out. No, sir, we never saw a submarine. I can't tell you how much water I've looked at.

Alexander: (Laughter) The whole Pacific Ocean.

Abbot: I'll tell you, we'd fly around and look at the water, fly around and look at the water, fly around and look at the water, fly around and look at the water. But I never saw a submarine.

Alexander: "Where's the war?" (chuckle)

Abbot: That's right. So, then the war did begin to move up a little bit, and they were going to put detachments into Nanumea. In fact, the SeaBees built a a strip in Nanumea. The Marines put a fighter squadron in there, and I took a three-plane detachment up there on Nanumea. At that point that was the closest approach to the Ellice Islands of anything that we had in the United States.

Alexander: I'm trying to remember where that is. Where's it near?

Abbot: Well, it's farther on northwest from Funafuti. Do you know where Funafuti is?

Alexander: Yes, about.

Abbot: Okay. Here's Samoa [gesture]. Almost due west is Wallis Island.

Alexander: Okay.

Abbot: Northwest of that is Funafuti. North northwest is Nanumea. Farther on, just about due north, are the Gilbert Islands--Tarawa, Abemama, Makin, those.

So, we had this little three-plane detachment with a Marine fighter squadron there at Nanumea. This would move would be in about October of 1943, just before we moved into Tarawa, before the war moved into Tarawa. In fact, it was at Nanumea...that's the first time that we, in our little squadron, ever even caught a glimpse of a Jap--that "Where is the war?" that you mentioned. This single Jap [airplane] would come down every night. We figured that he did it to try to keep people awake, but, also, he usually dropped one stick of bombs. The Marines...there was one Marine named Gafney. He wanted to shoot one of those things down so bad he couldn't stand it. We had this little primitive unit. I think that it was called an Argus unit, with radar on a trailer.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: And they would say that they had an incoming, and,

boy, ol' Gafney would launch himself in an F4F. He would fly out in that direction where the Japanese plane was supposed to be. They gave him an altitude. It was pretty rudimentary. Then they were trying to...Gafney couldn't see a damned thing, of course.

Alexander: (Chuckle) It was dark.

Abbot: Finally, things were going along, and all of a sudden, all of the searchlights came on at once, and there's the searchlight beam [gesture], and it was Gafney. [On the radio] he said, "No! No! No!"

Alexander: "Don't shoot!" (chuckle)

Abbot: "Don't shoot!" (chuckle) And poor Gafney never did get to shoot one of these things down. We reckoned that they were Bettys that would come down.

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Abbot: But that only lasted a few weeks, really, because then we took our detachment on back to Wallis, and we traded in our OS2Us for SBDs. We got a whole suite of SBDs. Incidentally, they were beat-up SBD3s that were kind of hand-me-downs from the Marines. But you know what? We never had hardly any trouble with them. If we had the parts, man, they just ran like a sewing machine. So, we finally got all of the SBDs, and very, very early in 1944--and by that I think that I mean December 31, 1943--we launched out of Wallis for the last time, heading for Tarawa. That was going to

be our new home base--at Tarawa--with detachments at Abemama and Makin.

Alexander: But you're going to be based at Tarawa with SBDs.

Abbot: We're going to be stationed at Tarawa with SBDs. That's right. We're finished with OS2Us now. As I said, that was about the last day of 1943.

So, we get on into 1944, and we get settled into a routine at Tarawa. You may recall that they built two strips. They built one over on the southwest and one over on the southeast side. That's where we were. One was called "Helen," and one was called "Ellen." I forget which one was which, but we were over on the one on the southeast corner. The horrible thing that happened to us is that we got "streamlined". See, I told you that down at Wallis, we were a self-contained squadron. We had had everything. When we left Wallis to go up to Tarawa, we had twelve SDBs and twelve pilots and the gunners and what we could carry in those SBDs, and, boy, that was it. We were supposed to be subsisted by...it was called it a CASU. I think that that's what the the name of it was. It was called a Carrier Aircraft Service Unit that was based on the beach [ashore], and our viewpoint was that the CASU largely looked out for itself, and the pilots...

Alexander: (Chuckle) "And to heck with everybody else!"

Abbot: ...were left on their own. We were sleeping in tents,

of course, with no screening. We had mosquito-netting. A guy named "Smoke" Streaan was the skipper of a Navy F4U night fighter outfit at Tarawa. So, "Smoke" and I--we've talked about this many times--were fellow squadron commanders there.

Alexander: He was a Marine, you say?

Abbot: No, no, he was Navy!

Alexander: Oh, with F4Us?

Abbot: Yes, Navy F4Us---F4U night fighters! In fact, I guess that they were F4U1Ns at about that time because the "fours" [F4U4Ns] weren't out [operational] then. These were "ones" [F4U1Ns].

Not only were we fellow squadron commanders, but we had both squadrons sleeping under mosquito netting, and we both contracted dengue fever at the same time.

Alexander: Oh, boy!

Abbot: Have you ever had dengue fever?

Alexander: No, never. I haven't had it, no.

Abbot: It's awful stuff. They call it "bone-break fever." You know, the bad thing about it is that, in addition to making you feel like you're either going to die or wish that you were going to die, your mental attitude is that you don't give a damn. The guys would come in and say, "Skipper! Jesus! We've only got two airplanes in commission!" I said, "So, what!"

Alexander: "Who cares?" (laughter)

Abbot: "I don't care how many airplanes we've got in commission!"

At any rate, it's [the so-called "bone-break" fever] bad stuff. It's carried, by the way, by the same mosquito as malaria. They call it anopheles or something like that.

We finally got over the dengue fever, and we got some parts, and we got some airplanes in commission pretty well. We got to operating fairly efficiently, then, at Tarawa with, I've mentioned, a three-plane detachment at Abemama and one at Makin. I also think that I forgot to tell you that we had, in addition to our SBDs, at least one--sometimes two--"Ducks"--J2Fs.

Alexander: J2Fs?

Abbot: Yes. That was a pretty versatile airplane.

Alexander: I'll say (chuckle).

Abbot: There are a lot of good "Duck" stories. You may not have time for this one. When the squadron was at British Samoa, they had a regular "milk run" [routine flight] where a guy would pick up the mail over on American Samoa at the field in a "Duck." He would take off in the "Duck"--he'd put his gear up, of course--and come around and land in the water opposite our camp. He'd taxi up on the ramp, and we'd get our mail there. Well--and this happened before I got there, so I didn't see this--for some reason the

"Duck" was located up in Pago Pago Harbor, where the squadron originally had been. So, this pilot...it's alleged to have been a Marine that did that, of course.

Alexander: Of course (chuckle).

Abbot: He gets in this "Duck" and grinds off into the air off the water, see. Well, he was accustomed to doing this with a load of mail, and as soon he gets off, he cranks the gear up. Well, this time he took off over the water, and he reached down, and he cranked the gear down. He flew all the way over from there to British Samoa with the gear down.

Alexander: Dragging along.

Abbot: Dragging along and wondering: "What in the hell is the matter with this airplane?" You know, there was no performance [the plane flew slowly and sluggishly]. He got out there, and, you know, everybody is always happy to see the mail plane come.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: He got out there and put that sucker in the water with the gear down, and it flipped him right over on his back. As I said, I was not there; I didn't see that. But I've heard it so many times that it's got to be the truth.

Alexander: And you know that it had to be a Marine pilot (chuckle)?

Abbot: Well, of course (chuckle). That's the only way that I would tell that one.

Alexander: I understand.

Abbot: So, there we were. We were at Tarawa, Abemama, and Makin, and we had six guys in the squadron by then who had been there the whole time together.

Alexander: Boy, that's interesting, isn't it?

Abbot: I'm talking about the pilots.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: The rest of our pilots had all been replacements, and the ones who had been there longer had left. But we were kind of the hard core, who had been the longest. By then it was getting close to eighteen months, and all six of us got orders to go back to the States and report to the people in San Francisco [California] for reassignment. My orders were different because for mine they read that I had to be "upon relief." I had to be "relieved" [from duty] because I was the commanding officer there. So, with them having orders in-hand, man, all that I'd do was endorse [sign] them and put them on a C-54 that night.

Alexander: They're gone.

Abbot: Yes, they're gone. I've got a photograph in my book of the five of them standing on the ladder of that C-54 with about the biggest grins that you ever saw in your life on them.

Alexander: (Chuckle).

Abbot: And I guess that I'm crying down there on the ground. But only two or three days later, this LB-30...have you ever hears of an LB-30?

Alexander: No.

Abbot: It's a version of of the B-24.

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Abbot: It is a version of the B-24. I'll tell you, it was akin to the bunch that the British bought, because it didn't have a turbo-supercharger. It had a mechanical "blower" [supercharger]. It was basically a lower altitude [flying] airplane. Anyhow, this was an Army Air Corps LB-30. It was used as a transport just like the C-54s and the R4Ds and the C-47s. This guy, Brubaker, whom I'd gotten to know--he used to come by in his C-47--was flying this LB-30. He came around and landed at Tarawa. He came around to see me, and he said, "Hey, 'Doc,' I want you to do me a favor!" I said, "What is it?" He said, "My copilot here [who was just a kid, of course] has got a deal with a sergeant over there on the other island to get a Jap pistol for four bottles of whiskey." I thought: "Oh, Jesus! Man, for four bottles of whiskey, I think that I could get you a case of Jap pistols!"

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: But, anyhow, I stayed out of that deal. He said,

"Could you fly 'em over there?" Well, I really had a lot to do, and I said, "Well, Brubaker, I can't do it, but I'll loan you an airplane." He said, "What airplane?" I said, "An SBD." He said, "An SBD?" I said, "That's right." So, I stuck Brubaker in the front cockpit, and we put this copilot in the back cockpit, and I showed him the stick and the controls.

Alexander: That's what I was going to say. Had he ever flown one before?.

Abbot: No, no, no.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: So, he thanked me, and off he went.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: Well, it wasn't twenty minutes later that they delivered the mail, which, incidentally, he had brought in on the LB-30, and there were the orders that I needed because my relief, Ricks, was already on board--he was there--but we didn't have the orders [to authorize the change of command], you see.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: Well, you talk about lining up a squadron in formation and having a change of command ceremony!

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: We did that in a hurry. So, Ricks was now the commanding officer. About then Brubaker came back from the other island. He came in and thanked me very

much for the loan of the airplane, and everything was fine. He got the Jap pistol, and he wanted to know what he could do for me. Well, now, I said, "Brubaker, I'll tell you what...." There was then at Tarawa a backlog of people awaiting transportation, who had orders to go, but there'd been no transportation, no way to go.

Alexander: To go any particular place?

Abbot: Oh, yes, to go back to the States!

Alexander: Oh, back to the States?

Abbot: Yes, back to the States. Not only was I way down on that list, but on the rank structure [of seniority], I was still just a lieutenant. So, he said, "Well, what can I do for you?" I said, "I'll tell you exactly what you can do for me. You just made me a member of your crew!" He said, "My crew?" I said, "That's right. I let you fly my airplane. Now you're going to let me fly your airplane. I'm a member of your crew."

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: And he did. I crawled into that thing that night, and we took off, and I was sitting down there thinking how nice things were. Brubaker looked down, and he said, "Hey, 'Doc!'" I said, "Yes." He said, "How about holding the yoke a minute." I thought that he had to go the head [latrine], you know. "Sure," I said. I

got up there and sat down. It was on autopilot. So, we were going along, and four hours later...

Alexander: (Laughter)

Abbot: ...Brubaker came back up, yes, but never mind. I would have sat there all night. So, that's when I came back to the States.

Alexander: Hold on! Hold on! You didn't get back to the States in that airplane.

Abbot: No, I didn't. I'm glad that you mentioned that. I got to Hickam Field [Oahu, Hawaii], of course, in that airplane and got off and started trying to get transportation from there to San Francisco. That's pretty bad.

Alexander: I was going to say. How bad was it?

Abbot: That was very bad. Believe it or not, the ride that I finally got to go to the West Coast was aboard [the aircraft carrier USS] Intrepid (CV-11)--the ship that I would one day command. She had just taken a torpedo, if you remember, a bit earlier.

Alexander: Oh, yes, she did.

Abbot: So, she had no steerable rudder. They had welded it in place and managed to stop the leaking. They were steering the ship with engines. So, I got aboard Intrepid and made it back to San Francisco.

Alexander: Did they go back to San Francisco just [steering the ship] by engines?

Abbot: Oh, yes. Yes, as far heading, as far as steering.
Oh, yes, sir.

Alexander: That makes for kind of a slow trip.

Abbot: Well, yes and no. I think that she made pretty good SOA. I don't remember. In other words, I think more than fifteen knots.

Alexander: Oh, that's pretty good then.

Abbot: So, I got back to San Francisco, and those guys were still there--the other five. We had a reunion, and we were talking about how: "Okay, we're going to stay together; we're going to go down to refresher training down in Melbourne [Florida] or somewhere, and we're going to come back in the same fighter squadron."

It didn't work like that. They all got orders to Melbourne, and I got orders to Pensacola--to the staff of CNATRA [Chief of Naval Air Training]. That's not Frank Sinatra.

Alexander: No, I know.

Abbot: He [CNATRA] was then, I think, George Murray. I got there, and he was relieved by a guy named [Admiral Charles A.] "Baldy" Pownall. He had been the skipper of [the aircraft carrier USS] Enterprise as a captain when I first got aboard in 1939. [Editor's note: On August 6, 1943, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, CINCPAC, selected Pownall as Commander, Fast Carrier Division.] So, I go up to the staff of the Chief of Naval Air

Training. I got a billet [assignment] called Engineering Training Officer.

Alexander: Where are we in time?

Abbot: The time then, you see, was like March of 1944. Yes, sir. I was at CNATRA, and I stayed on that bloody staff until...I reckon that it was September 1946.

Alexander: Wow! You spent the rest of the war there.

Abbot: Yes, I spent the rest of the war there. I spent the rest of the war there. In fact, I was there for nearly a year after the war. See, in fact, everybody knows where he was on V-J Day [Victory over Japan Day, September 2, 1945]. In August, 1945, I was flying airplanes anytime that I got a chance. One of these captains, who came in from the educational world, he wanted to go...his wife was in Newport [Rhode Island], so I flew him to Quonset Point [Rhode Island] in a Beechcraft. I was staying in the BOQ [bachelor officer's quarters] the night that the news happened--V-J Day. This other guy and I went out trying to find some "action" [a party]. In that town of Providence [Rhode Island], I swear to God, they "rolled those sidewalks up" [everything in town was closed], I think, at dark.

Alexander: Even on that night.

Abbot: That's right. Even on that night. You would have thought that they'd have been partying. But, anyhow,

we finally went back out to the air station and had a drink in the bar. That's how we celebrated.

Alexander: You didn't have as much fun as I did, because I was in Chicago [Illinois].

Abbot: Oh, on V-J Day night?

Alexander: Yes. Well, at nights I had free liberty.

Abbot: Wow! So, anyhow...

Alexander: Keep that off this record, please (chuckle). I don't want to hear necessarily about it (chuckle).

Abbot: I left Pensacola, finally, in September, 1946, with orders in hand to command VF-4B, which was a Corsair outfit in the [aircraft carrier USS Franklin D. Roosevelt air group. So, I went to Miami [Florida]. The orders took me through refresher training in Miami.

Alexander: Back to Opa-locka.

Abbot: Yes, except that, actually, what they had there then-- this was September, 1946--was F6Fs. They didn't have Corsairs.

Alexander: Well, wait. It was later that that. The F4Us were later. We had F6Fs and TBFs.

Abbot: Yes. Well, I did my refresher training at Miami and got my refresher carrier landings in F6Fs, The carrier landings were back up at Pensacola aboard...it was either the Ranger or...what the hell was the name of the CVL that they had at Pensacola for a while?

They didn't have many of them, you remember.

Alexander: It was "Lex" [USS Lexington] because she was...

Abbot: Oh, no, it was long after before that. "Lex" was an Essex-class carrier.

Alexander: Yes, she was.

Abbot: But the Ranger was still in commission--the old CV-4-- and was used for training. Anyhow, I got my refresher landings and reported to Norfolk in October of 1946 and relieved a guy named Frank Welch, Naval Academy Class of 1939, as skipper. The squadron was a Roosevelt squadron. At first, it was called VBF-75-- "V" for fixed-wing; "B" for bomber; "F" for fighter-- Fighter Bomber Squadron-75

Alexander: Oh, I see.

Abbot: Then several months later...and, by the way, we had brand-new F4U4Bs. Now the F4U4B was the best Corsair that was ever built. You may recall that the F4U1, the original one, was a "dog" [performed poorly] on a carrier.

Alexander: I think that I remember hearing that, yes.

Abbot; It would bounce into the fence [reference to the arresting cable that would stop a aircraft landing on a carrier in a short distance]. The tail wheel sat so low that you couldn't see anything out of it [the cockpit]. Chance-Vought [reference to the manufacturer of the F4U Corsair] built up the canopy

and put a bubble top on it and a longer tail wheel strut and put stiffer oleos on the main [landing] gear, and that changed the airplane. It turned from the worst carrier airplane to the best.

Alexander: The only way that I knew that you could land the other versions was to just drop the trailing edge of the wing.

Abbot: Yes.

Alexander: There was no other way. You can't see it [the deck of the aircraft carrier].

Abbot: No, that was the way that it was.

Alexander: I sat in one that was on the ramp, and you can't see anything.

Abbot: Well, it was a wonderful airplane. That was in the fall, you see, of 1946. In 1947 we took a cruise on the Roosevelt, and it was, I guess, a 2nd Fleet cruise. We had a couple of other carriers with us. We had the Coral Sea and one other carrier. We ranged pretty far. We got over about as far as the Azores. Then on the way back over, we were going to make some port calls, actually, at Port-au-Prince [Haiti], believe it or not, and San Juan [Puerto Rico].

There's one incident that I remember so well. We were going to have an exercise where we were going to launch [our aircraft] several hours before dawn and have a 400-nautical-mile fighter sweep go into, I

guess they called it, [Point] Borinquen. It was then an Air Force base on the west tip of Puerto Rico. Actually, that was straining it a little bit on range [reference to the fuel capacity of the aircraft in terms of their distance from the ship], but it was still going to be steaming toward us, you see. About--I don't know--3:00 in the morning or something like that, I had a Marine shaking me by the shoulder, and he said, "The captain wants to see you at Flight Deck Control!" I got up to Flight Deck Control. The captain then was J. P. W. Vest, and the air group commander--the CAG [Commander, Air Group]--was Charlie Turner out of [the United States Naval Academy Class of] 1935. J. P. W. Vest...in the first place, most carrier skippers, you know, look like hell--they haven't had sleep in a while. When I looked at him, I thought: "I see. This is World War III!"

Alexander: "It's started."

Abbot: "This is the announcement," you know.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: He said, "Gentlemen..."

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Alexander This is Side 2 of Admiral Abbot's tape.

Abbot: So, Captain Vest said, "Gentlemen, I've got grave news!" We said, "What's up?" He said, "Our Landing Signal Officer fell down number three elevator well a

little while ago and broke his arm." We said, "He did!" (laughter)

Alexander: (Laughter) I'll bet that that brought several smiles to the faces of the men.

Abbot: "He did!" And the captain got mad us a little bit. He said, "Well, wait a minute! I'm serious. I want to know what this is going to do about whether we can launch this fighter sweep." We said, "What the hell has he got to with it?"

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: And the fact of the matter is, we had a night fighter unit aboard, and they had their own LSO [landing signal officer], a guy we'd all gotten to know. He was so damned much better than Doleanna (?) that there was no comparison, although he did have bad athlete's foot. Oh, the poor bastard, he wore these great, big over-sized tennis shoes with stuff between his toes.

We said, "Captain, don't worry about it! That's got nothing to do with it! You launch us! We'll get back aboard!" And, indeed, we did. We launched, and we had a successful mission. Poor Doleanna (?), he did have a broken arm, but he was a lousy LSO. There's no question about that.

Alexander: In that kind of an event...how many of you were there?

Abbot: In Flight Deck Control?

Abbot: No, who made the flight.

Alexander: Oh, I'll tell you. It would have been a pretty good-sized launch. I had a big squadron. Do you know that I had thirty-two Corsairs and forty-five pilots in that one squadron. And by then, see, the squadron started out as VBF-75. Then the name changed to VF-4B. Nothing else changed--the same airplanes; the same pilots--but just the name was changed to VF-4B. Later on, after this, the name changed to VF-42.

Alexander: Did they just have somebody who liked to change the names?

Abbot: Changing names, but it was the same squadron. I had the job for twenty-six months.

Alexander: And your rank was what?

Abbot: I was a lieutenant commander. It's the best job I ever had. You know, you can't beat being skipper of a squadron. It is a good job. So, that was no problem. We made the fighter sweep. We had a good cruise on that 2nd Fleet cruise. I guess maybe that I ought to tell on myself about one incident that happened a bit earlier.

Alexander: All right.

Abbot: Ordinarily, we would land second in sequence. The "Yellow-Tailed Squadron," VF-41, would land, and then we would come on in behind them. So, I pinned my interval [estimated the distance] on the last guy in VF-41 and tried to get a good interval on him. Well,

on this particular day, I came in...in those days, you know, we didn't come straight in. You were turning right in to the fantail. See, it was a straight-decked carrier, of course.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: And this guy ahead in me from VF-41...we had a term for it. He was "scratching his ass in the gear." He wasn't out of the [steel wire rope airplane arresting cable for carrier landings], so I got a foul deck "wave off" [abort the landing] signal from the LSO. If I do say so myself, I got very few "wave offs" when I was flying. So, I "poured the coal to it" [accelerated the airplane], and I looked at this guy in the gear and sucked up the landing gear and went on around. Then I had to take my interval on the last guy coming in there, you see.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: So, I did that. I got my interval and came on around and started around for my final approach. See, my landing gear...I put my landing gear down. I did put the gear down, but the hook [reference to the so-called "tail hook" used to snag the steel wire rope airplane arresting cable for carrier landings] was still up.

Alexander: Oh!

Abbot: See, I had sucked up the gear and took the "wave off."

Alexander: But you didn't get the hook down.

Abbot: So, anyhow, I came in, made a nice pass, got a "cut" [cut throttle signal from the LSO for landing], and landed right on the spot with no hook.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: I piled into that [emergency landing] fence. I swear to God that you feel like you're...you're so accustomed to getting deceleration [from the hook snagging the arresting cable] that it felt like I had accelerated.

Alexander: Oh, I'll bet that it did.

Abbot: I hit that fence, and she [the aircraft] went up right on the nose. I've got a picture somewhere of that airplane sitting [upright] on the "spinner" [reference to a cowling covering the propeller shaft designed to reduce air resistance] in front of the fence. Fortunately, with about thirty-five knots [of headwind] right over the [bow of] the deck blowing on the tail [of the airplane], it blew it back so that that it didn't go completely over. But it hit hard. You know, I had all of my weight on this tailbone [gesture], and it [the landing] was hard. So, they lifted me out of the cockpit and took me down to sickbay. They took X-rays and said, "No, you're all right." I had a sore back. And the interesting thing...you know, in those days, and maybe still, if a

guy has had an accident, you always figure that the best thing that you can do is put him back in the air as soon as possible.

Alexander: Yes, I've always heard that that's the correct way to do it.

Abbot: But here I am, a squadron commander, so I put myself back in the air that afternoon.

Alexander: Oh, you did?

Abbot: Yes, and, I'll tell you, I had a sore back, but you talk about a careful landing (laughter).

Alexander: (Chuckle) Yes. Everybody was watching, too.

Abbot: Oh, you can be sure of that. I had the hook down! I thought that...I really expected to get my ass chewed out. I thought that I deserved to get my ass chewed out. I got sent for by the captain. The captain got me up on the bridge, and do you know what he did? He apologized to me.

Alexander: He did?

Abbot: He did. He said, "'Doc,' damn it. I'm sorry. That's my responsibility." We have a guy back there by the platform [who's called the "hook down man"]. That's his only job [to see whether the airplane's tail hook is down]. They had a fairly new guy on the job, and he had only learned how to say, "Hook down!"

Alexander: He hadn't learned to look up.

Abbot: He didn't actually look and see if the hook was down.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: But he said the right words, that it was down. But I thought that that was kind of nice. It made me feel better...

Alexander: Well, it did.

Abbot: ...to have the captain apologize to me for something that I was damned sure--and still am sure--was my fault.

Alexander: Yes, I understand. You had creamed up a pretty good airplane.

Abbot: I did, although it got back into commission, believe it or not. I never felt like it was quite...well, I'll tell you when I never felt like it was quite the same. I think that it was on this same cruise. We had taken them all aboard [landed the complement of launched aircraft], and they were all stacked up forward. The weather kept getting worse and worse and worse. The air boss kept asking the captain if he could pull them back. They were trying to wait for the damned flag [admiral] to tell us the schedule for the next day, so they'd know when they pulled them back what order to go in, you see.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: Well, finally, it got so bad and so rough, and she [the aircraft carrier] was pitching so much, that it was actually too dangerous to start trying to pull

them back. So, they just lashed them down where they were; and where they were, they were on the very front row, right at the bow of the flight deck. There were five planes...

Alexander: Oh, boy.

Abbot: ...and I think that they were SB2Cs. On the next row...she's a little wider there--the deck was wider there--and there were six airplanes on the second row, and then on back. My airplane was one of those six in the second row. I was standing on the side of the [aircraft carrier's superstructure] island watching when this happened. She [the aircraft carrier] nosed down into one of those swells--they say that the seventh swell of seven swells is the biggest one--it was the biggest damned swell that you ever saw--and stuck her whole nose [bow] into that swell. This was the Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Alexander: Wow!

Abbot: And solid green water came up over that deck. That first row of airplanes--five airplanes all in a row--nothing was ever seen of those five again. The second row of airplanes, all were strikes [rendered permanently inoperable] except my airplane. They finally got my airplane back into commission, and ever after that--I don't know whether it was imagination or what--I felt like that just as I about got abeam of

the island [on takeoffs], I could hear it sputtering.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: You know, where you kind of hold a tight ass and keep on going.

Alexander: (Chuckle) You sure do.

Abbot: But we got back from that cruise, and this was really still in 1947. Then we got on through, and we had a wonderful hurricane evacuation that year from Norfolk to Buffalo [New York].

Alexander: Oh.

Abbot: We took the whole air group up there. That was an adventure.

Alexander: Isn't Buffalo a great liberty town?

Abbot: Oh, man! You know what? All of those ladies who had worked in World War II, who were volunteers and they drove station wagons, they got their uniforms back on, even if they had to button them a little tight. We had the Salvation Army over on one side of the base, and then another organization...I forget the name of it. But they were competing with one another on opposite sides of the island to see who could spoil the pilots the worst.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: I mean, these people would have more different kinds of [homemade] donuts and everything. Oh, that was a time! In fact, it was on that evacuation in Buffalo

that I got hold of a new pilot for my squadron--one of the best that I ever got. It was about 9:00 at night that they called up from the lobby, and my boss, Charlie Turner, the air group commander, was also Fleet Air Commander. He was the senior man in Buffalo. They said, "We've got a midshipman [aviation midshipman] down here in the lobby, and we've got no more room for him and no place for him to sleep. Well, Charlie Turner and Don Gay and I, the three of us, had this enormous, big place. We said, "Send him up here!" So, they sent this kid, Charlie Waring, a midshipman, up there. He had just got out of flight training and got his wings as a midshipman! Remember, they had that then. They hadn't commissioned him yet.

Alexander: I had forgotten that, yes.

Abbot: Oh, yes, he was still a midshipman. And we started interrogating him.

Alexander: The poor guy didn't stand a chance (chuckle).

Abbot: Well, he was in a pool of pilots there at Norfolk. He got up early, and he'd get in an airplane, and they'd tell him to fly it Buffalo. He'd fly it to Buffalo. When he got there, there was a C-47 waiting, and he'd get in it and fly back to Norfolk. He'd get back there, and he'd get another airplane and fly it to Buffalo.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: Then he'd go find the C-47 and go back to Norfolk. Finally, it was getting late in the afternoon, and they looked around and said, "Well, there ain't much else that has to go. There's a TBF here. Can you fly a TBF?" "Yes, sir!" Christ! He'd never even seen a TBF before (chuckle).

Alexander: (Laughter)

Abbot: So, he climbed in that TBF and grinds off and comes into Buffalo just about dark, and there was no place to sleep.

Alexander: Oh, geez!

Abbot: And, boy, I made a mental note of that. I said, "That's the kind of pilot that I'm looking for."

Alexander: You bet!

Abbot: I got down to Norfolk the next week, and my old friend "Dog" Smith was there. I said, "Listen, I don't know who's running these pilots in the pool and everything, but I want [that one]!" And I got him. I never was sorry for a minute about that.

Alexander: Isn't that interesting.

Abbot: Oh, yes. But I'm afraid that I'm diverging from what you want or need.

Alexander: No, you're doing fine. These things are very important. We will go on from here.

Abbot: Let's go on into my career. You've got to get me out of that squadron.

I went on into 1948. They were going to come out with the F4U5, so we sent a message to the "Great White Father," saying that "We think that we ought to go up and ferry those first F4U5s down." And the answer came back: "No!" Well, we'd just had a new air group commander, Turner Caldwell. Have you ever heard of Turner Caldwell?

Alexander: No.

Abbot: He'd come in as a pretty famous naval aviator. He had the world speed record some of the time. He was then a commander, of course. He'd just relieved Charlie Turner. Well, Turner Caldwell got into an airplane and went storming up to Washington [D.C.], and later that afternoon we got a message back from Washington. It said, "We didn't mean 'No.' We meant 'Yes!' You guys go on up and pick up those F4U5s!" Now, Turner came flying back in late that afternoon, and I'll tell you what. The people of that air group were standing around just to see if they could watch him "walk on water."

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: I mean, he had really done it.

Alexander: He had really done a job.

Abbot: But we did. We went up to the factory and got the first five F4U5s. What a horrible machine it was!

Alexander: Was it really?

Abbot: It was really horrible. In the first place, it was cold. It was thirteen degrees Farenheit that morning, and we found out something that later became common knowledge. To start one of them, you had to first catch it on fire three times. Then you start it and go. Well, to make a long story short, we finally...we got a whole suite [squadron] of them. I had thirty-two of the damned things. You'd land at Norfolk, and at the end of the landing roll-out, you'd start to turn off [the runway], and the engine would quit. You couldn't restart her.

Alexander: Oh!

Abbot: They'd get a tractor [prime mover] and tow you in. So, we were supposed to deploy to the "Med" [Mediterranean Sea] the first of October [1948], and we're getting up toward about June; and we were due to go to Guantanamo [Bay, Cuba] in July and August. So, I finally went around to COMNAVAIRLANT [Commander, Naval Air Forces, Atlantic Fleet, also COMAIRLANT], and I said, "This is not going to work! That airplane won't work!" So, they heaved around, and for the second time in my life, I got outfitted with Marine castoffs. They took our F4U5s, and they gave us a suite of thirty-two F4U4s--not F4U4Bs--that the Marines had used. They were beat-up airplanes, but you know what? We never had a bit of trouble with

them, and they were good airplanes. The only difference, that you may know, was that the F4U4 had six "fifties" [.50-caliber machine guns], and the F4UB had four 20-millimeter cannons, and they had hydraulic [opening and closing] canopies and a few things like that.

Alexander: Oh, great. Yes.

Abbot: Otherwise, the airplanes were the same--a good airplane. So, we got those F4Us, and we went to "Gitmo" [Guantanamo] and had a wonderful training record down there. We got a bunch of people night-qualified. We went to the "Med" in the fall of 1948 and spent October and November and half of December on that "Med" cruise. I got relieved in the "Med."

Alexander: What ship were you on?

Abbot: I was on the Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Alexander: Oh, you were still on the Roosevelt.

Abbot: Yes. The guy who relieved me in Naples [Italy] in December, 1948, was John Sweeney, Naval Academy Class of 1938. So, I was leaving the squadron, and I had to go to Washington [D.C.], OP 542 in the "Puzzle Palace" [the Pentagon].

Alexander: "Puzzle Palace" (chuckle).

Abbot: I spent two years there. That is the Washington office of the Training Command. I concerned myself with the training--nothing really significant career-

wise, I don't think. As penance, you have to serve some time in the "Puzzle Palace."

Alexander: Yes (chuckle).

Abbot: So, at the end of that tour in Washington, they were threatening to send me to a "big iron boat" [in a non-flying capacity aboard an Essex-class attack aircraft carrier]. You know, for a guy who likes to fly airplanes, that sounds like the end of the world.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: So, I finally wrangled a way to get ordered to VU-4--a utility squadron in Chincoteague, Virginia. I went there and I relieved "Red" Boker, [United States] Naval Academy] Class of 1935. You know, it was a wonderful...it was not necessarily a career-enhancing job, but you'd fly airplanes all of the time. I had seven different kinds of airplanes to fly. Can you imagine that?

Alexander: Did you?

Abbot: Would you believe PBMSAs? I got checked out [qualified] in that sucker. The JD, do you know that airplane? It's the Navy's version of the Douglas B-26. They used them to tow targets.

Alexander: Oh, yes. I've shot at them (chuckle).

Abbot: Yes. There you go. We had a couple of Beechcraft SNBs We had F6F drones [pilotless radio-controlled airplanes] and F7F and F8F [drone] control planes. I

left something out because we had seven different kinds of airplanes. Of course, I got to fly all of them. It was a good job. I had that job for about a year-and-a-half. One of the big factors there was that I wrangled ferrying three JDs from Norfolk around to Port Lyautey [Morocco].

Alexander: Port Lyautey.

Abbot: Port Lyautey is in North Africa. [Editor's note: Port Lyautey has been renamed Kenitra.]

Alexander: Oh.

Abbot: A U. S. naval station in North Africa. They operated JDs there to tow targets for the fleet--the 6th Fleet. They had old beat-up, worn-out JDs, and they had three brand-new...well, out of overhaul [overdue for overhaul] JDs, and we said--I thought that it was a good rationale--"Look, we're checked out. Let us take them home." The ferry squadron had no one checked out with JDs. We took these three JDs around to Port Lyautey. We had a "ball" [good time]. In fact, if I told all about that job, we'd be here all night.

Alexander: Okay (chuckle).

Abbot: Then we got back to VU-4. I left there after a year-and-a-half and went to a six-month course at the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia. From there in 1953 to Pensacola on the staff of the Chief of Naval Air Basic Training as his plans and

operations officer. I spent two years there and then, finally, got ordered to a "big iron boat" [Essex-class attack aircraft carrier].

Alexander: What are you in rank?

Abbot: I was a commander by now.

Alexander: The "big iron boat" was what?

Abbot: The "big iron boat" was the Lake Champlain. The Lake Champlain was commanded by [James H.] Jimmy Flatley was the skipper. [Editor's note: Flatley, along with Lieutenant Commander John S. Thach ("Thach weave"), were primarily responsible for developing fighter tactics used effectively against the Japanese Zero during the Guadalcanal Campaign during World War II.] I was ordered there as his operations officer. I was the number three man. I deployed to the "Med" aboard the Lake Champlain. Let's see. That was in the fall of 1955. Then "Ace" Barton left before Christmas, and I "fleeted up" [was promoted because of being next on board in terms of seniority] and relieved him as executive officer, so I remained as the executive officer of the Lake Champlain. We came back from the "Med."

Alexander: For the purpose of people reading this, what was the significant about the Lake Champlain? What is a "big iron boat?"

Abbot: Oh, the Lake Champlain was an Essex-class attack

carrier. She had steam "cats" [steam-driven catapults to assist airplanes in taking off], but she did not have the angled deck. [Editor's note: The term "angled deck" refers a post-World War II American innovation applied to aircraft carriers. The design allows for simultaneous launching of aircraft straight ahead into the wind from the bow and recovery of returning aircraft landing at an angle across the rear of the flight deck.] She was the last straight-deck [carrier]. She was kind of unique. I guess that they called it a 27-C conversion. They had 27-A conversions for the Essex, which was a streamlined stack, and they got hydraulic "cats." The 27-C conversions got steam "cats." Then they added angled decks to it.

Alexander: Like they did to the "Lex?"

Abbot: The "Lex" was a 27-C conversion with steam "cats" and the angled deck. That's right.

So, I was relieved in August, I think--yes, it would have been August--by Larry Geis, a classmate of mine.

Alexander: What year was this?

Abbot: The year was 1956. I was ordered to the staff of Commander, Carrier Division 2. Frank Ward was the carrier division commander. Dick Kibb was chief of staff, and I was "ops" [operations officer]. I was

the number three man. At that time, I had been recruited...the Lake Champlain was in the Brooklyn [New York] Navy Yard that summer. I got recruited to be on a TV [television] show named "Name That Tune."

Alexander: Yes, I remember that.

Abbot: And I had a "ball." I was on there with my little sixteen-year-old partner, and we lasted for about six programs.

Alexander: Oh, did you?

Abbot: Frank Ward and his people left me there until I got knocked off, and they went on to the "Med" about a couple of weeks ahead of me. I promised them that I'd give them a nice party [with his prize money] when I got there.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: And, sure enough, I got knocked off a couple of weeks later. I flew over to the "Med" and joined them in Genoa [Italy] and threw a hell of nice party for the staff.

Alexander: You did? Okay.

Abbot: So, therefore, we had that Christmas in the "Med" at Cannes [France]. That was my second consecutive Christmas in the "Med" because for the one before, I had been on the Lake Champlain, you see.

Alexander: Yes, yes.

Abbot: Then, again, I was there with CARDIV 2 [Carrier

Division 2]. So, finally, I'm coming around into the August of 1957. At the end of my CARDIV 2 tour, I went to the executive department of the Naval Academy and stayed there for three years plus. I went to the Naval Academy in August, 1957. I spent the first year there as assistant to the commandant. The next two years I spent as the executive officer of Bancroft Hall.

Alexander: You were?

Abbot: Yes, that's the "He Bitch of Buchenwald"--the "good order and discipline man."

Alexander: (Chuckle) Yes.

Abbot: In the fall of 1960 I went aboard the Valcour as commanding officer. I was ordered back from the Valcour in Bombay, India, to take command of the USS Intrepid in the the spring of 1962, I guess it was. Anyhow, I got a letter from the detailer [officer-in-charge of making new duty assignments], Ralph Cousins, that said that I was going to the National War College, and "congratulations" and all of that stuff. That would have been [my assignment to] the National War College Class of 1963. So, it was in 1962. So, then everything was fine.

A few weeks later, I got another letter from Ralph Cousins: "Dear 'Doc': Guess what? You don't have to go to the War College. Lou Kern has gotten

[assigned to command] Carrier Division 5 on the 'other ocean' [the Pacific Ocean], and he has demanded [that you be assigned as] for his chief of staff. Congratulations [and so on]." That was BS [bullshit], if you've ever heard it.

Alexander: Yes, that's pretty good.

Abbot: So, that's where I went. I went on to the "the other ocean," and I reported to Carrier Division 5 in about...oh, it was sometime in that summer of 1962. We stayed for a couple of months, and then we deployed to WESPAC [assignment to the Western Pacific Fleet], Carrier Division 5 Staff. We rode several carriers over there. We rode the Kitty Hawk, the Constellation.

Alexander: Let me ask you something. Were you anywhere in there [in those years from 1950-1953] supporting the Korean War? You weren't, were you? You were supporting the Vietnam War effort in those days, weren't you?

Abbot: No, the Korean War was when I was at Chincoteague.

Alexander: That's right.

Abbot: I was in the wrong ocean during the Korean War. That's right.

Alexander Okay.

Abbot: So, we had a pretty good...in fact, my relationship with Lou Kern, who's dead now, was a wonderful, wonderful relationship. I was the chief of staff,

and, by God, Lou let me run it. And every morning after breakfast, we'd keep all of the heads of departments at the table, and we'd get all of the message traffic. I'd pass the messages around to everybody, you see. We'd talk about the [after] action [reports in debriefing from the operations of the day before] and really get a big part of the day's work done right there that morning, and then we'd disperse. Then about two months before I left, Lou Kern got relieved by...God, I never thought that I'd forget that guy's name (chuckle)--"Whitey" Moore.

Alexander: You'll get it.

Abbot: I'll get it. And life went from sublime to horrible. The first morning [under the new man's command], you know, we all had breakfast together and the new admiral, "Whitey" Moore, was there. He got up [after breakfast] and went on back to his bedroom. The messenger came in and got the [radio message] traffic, and we passed out the messages. Then the admiral came out and looked at me, and he said, "Would you mind conducting your business in your own stateroom!"

Alexander: Geez!

Abbot: Just like that! (Chuckle) So, I went on, and it just really kind of got from bad to worse.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: "Swede" Vejetsa was the skipper of the ship. He was

the "flag captain." I think that it was the Kitty Hawk, but, anyhow, it was one of the big-deck aircraft carriers. "Swede" Vejetsa is a very prominent pilot, and he was a good man. He still lives, by the way.

One night fairly late, maybe 9:00 or 10:00, let's say, "Swede" had come down from the bridge and was in the inboard cabin talking to the admiral and me about some kind of [classified Navy] business. I realized, all of a sudden, that there there was a steward standing there. I said, "Admiral, would you like a cup of coffee?" "Yes, I would." Then I said, "'Swede,' do you want a cup of coffee?" He said, "Yes, I want a cup of coffee." So, I asked the steward to bring us three cups of coffee. Well, pretty soon the steward came back, and just about the time that he brought the coffee back, we'd finished the business. So, the admiral got up and walked into his bedroom, and "Swede" and I were sitting there finishing our coffee, you see. [Referring to the admiral] I'll be damned if he didn't come out of the bedroom and look at me and say, "Would you mind doing your entertaining in your own cabin?" You can't believe this, but "Whitey" Moore...that was the guy's name.

Alexander: You knew that that was going to happen.

Abbot: He's dead now.

Alexander: Maybe it's not as noisy where he is (chuckle).

Abbot: But I'll tell you what. I'm not the only man who ever ran afoul of "Whitey" Moore--I'll promise you that. In fact, it was a miracle of some kind that I ever made [was promoted to] flag rank, because he really....he gave me the worst fitness report [reference to an official United States Navy report which evaluates an officer's competence to command] that I've ever gotten in my whole life. You know, they had a place on there [on the Navy fitness report] where you'd put marks, and anybody who's going to get ahead has got most of his marks over here on the left-hand [gesture] side. The marks [that Admiral Moore made] were over about right about straight down the middle. In other words, where it said, "This is an average guy who seldom 'picks his nose.'" You know, that kind of stuff [nothing noteworthy to report]. Then where they've got the place where you put the "bull" [bullshit], you know, where you put the stuff that you think about the individual...

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: ...he had one line that said, "This officer is so intent that it borders on presumptuousness."

Alexander: Oh, gee whiz (chuckle)!

Abbot: Yes! That's right. So, I got relieved [of command] by a guy named Jim Daniels. I tried my best to warn

Jim ahead of time about "Whitey" Moore (chuckle), and Jim said, "Oh, don't worry, 'Doc.' I can get along with anybody." Well, I saw Jim a few years later...

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: ...and he said (chuckle) that I had had it right, you know. And Jim did not make flag officer.

So, I finally...oh, I guess that I didn't tell you that Ralph Cousins...two things. He was the guy, you remember, who was the detail officer who had told me: "Good news, 'Doc.' You don't have to go to the War College." Well, guess who took my place at the War College--Ralph Cousins.

Alexander: Oh, he did.

Abbot: Yes, he did.

Alexander: Oh, boy.

Abbot: But he took care of me. He got me into the next class. So, I went on to the National War College--the Class of 1963. I went from there on back to the "Puzzle Palace." This time I was in the "study" [research] business --"Op-91."

Alexander: The "study" business?

Abbot: You know, doing studies. They had a place called the Center for Naval Analysis.

Alexander: Yes. I've been there.

Abbot: Op-91 was the monitor for the Center of Naval Analysis. I spent, really, altogether more than two

years there. I did get selected to flag rank.

Abbot: I had her for a little while. Then I went to the Intrepid. Then from the Intrepid I went to CARDIV 5 [Carrier Division 5].

Abbot: So, finally, I made flag rank. My first flag job was the Antarctic Support Force. In fact, this guy "Smoke" Streaan, the guy that I told you about, that we had had dengue fever together back at Tarawa...

Alexander: Yes, yes.

Abbot: "Smoke" was then a rear admiral and was the detail officer in BUPERS [United States Navy Bureau of Personnel] for flag officers. He called me one day, and he said, "'Doc,' I just wanted you to know that we've got plans to have you relieve Fred Bakutis." I said, "Bullshit!" I knew where Fred Bakutis was. He was down in the Antarctic. So, I said, "Well, what do you want me to do about it, 'Smoke?'" He said, "Well, I want you to go home. I want you talk to Marge [Mrs. Abbot] and see what she thinks about. Then come back and call me tomorrow." I said, 'Smoke,' it's been my understanding that 'fresh caught' [newly promoted] rear admirals don't have a Goddamned thing to say about where they go!"

Alexander: (Chuckle)...about where they're going to go.

Abbot: "Smoke" said, "That's 'r-i-i-i-i-q-h-t!'"

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: (Chuckle) So, I said, "What you want me to do is, you want me to go home and talk to Marge and tell her where we're going and come back here tomorrow and call you tell you that Marge said it's okay." He said, "That's 'r-i-i-i-i-g-h-t!'"

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: And that's what it was. And you know what? I went down there and relieved Fred Bakutis, and it was one of the best jobs that I ever had. It was a very enjoyable job. And my wife enjoyed the job.

Alexander: How could she enjoy the Antarctic?

Abbot: Well, I'll you what. There was more to it than meets the eye. In the first place, it's probably the only billet that I know of that a rear admiral is in that had written authority from CNO [Chief of Naval Operations] to take his wife with him on the airplane on movements of the command, so she got to ride with me from Washington [D.C.] to Christ Church [New Zealand] and when we were going around New Zealand on official business, and from Christ Church back to Washington. See, in those days you followed the sun. You had an office in the Washington Navy Yard for six months. The six months were roughly March to September-October, and you spent that time fighting for the budget for the next year. Then you went down to the ice in October. You really went to New

Zealand. You see, you had an office in New Zealand, and then you commuted to the ice from New Zealand...

Alexander: Oh, okay.

Abbot: ...to spend that money that you'd worked for. Really, it was a very, very interesting part of my life.

Alexander: I'll bet that it is. I'll bet it is.

Abbot: See, the National Science Foundation does the work down there, and the Navy just provides logistic support. But I managed...they flew LC-130s--the "Herc" [Hercules] with skis. That's what the "L" means. A C-130 is a C-130. An LC-130 had skis. I hadn't ever seen a C-130, so I called a guy, a Marine that I knew out on the West Coast. They had the Marine C-130 school. I said, "I've got to come out there and go through your school." He said, "Okay, 'Doc,' we'll see if we can you a quota." I said, "Wait a minute!"

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: "We can't get any quota. That would be impossible. Nobody would 'okay' it. You've just got to let me come out there." So, I did. I went out there and went through their ground school and their flight school a flew the C-130.

Alexander: That's a great old man's airplanes.

Abbot: Oh, man!

Alexander: It's incredible.

Abbot: It is a gentleman's airplane.

Alexander: Yes, it is.

Abbot: It's a little bit like going flying on your front porch.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: It really is.

Alexander: I know. I've flown "right seat" [copilot] in one one night over the Brooks Range in Alaska.

Abbot: I never flew the airplane anywhere except from the "left seat" [pilot], and there's enough room...you're sitting there, and if somebody wants to come up and talk to you, he'd come around this way [gesture].

Alexander: On that side.

Abbot: Yes. Oh, yes. In fact, I used to say that I did the hard work [facetious statement]. I got in; I cranked them [the engines] up; I taxied; I took off; I climbed up and leveled out; and then I put it on autopilot, and I'd go back and get on that lounge. I operated out of three briefcases. I'd have the flag secretary handing me papers, and I'd move the papers--most of them--into the waste basket. Then, when it was time to start the letdown [process of descending to land the airplane], I'd go back and do the letdown, the approach, and the landing, you see.

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: So, you see, it was hard work [facetious comment].

Alexander: (Chuckle) Oh, it was. I'll bet.

Abbot: But I enjoyed every minute of it.

Alexander: I'll bet that you did.

Abbot: And, in fact, the last time that we came...see, the first time that we went down--"we" is my wife and I-- we went in a Super "Connie" [Lockheed Super Constellation]. I'm going to tell you something-- that's a long way [to fly] in a Super "Connie"...

Alexander: Yes, it sure is.

Abbot: ...although it is pressurized.

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Abbot: So, we got down there, and, in fact, that time we stopped by Tahiti, and we had a nice little "boondoggle" [good time] out of that.

Alexander: Yes.

Abbot: Then we [the Navy Antarctic Support Force] got rid of the Super "Connies," and after that I was flying the "Herc." So, the very last time that we came back to the States together was after I had actually been relieved. [Rear-Admiral] Kelly Welch relieved me down there.

I told people that I just couldn't seem to find our way [facetious statement]. We took off, and we were heading back for the States, you see, and, my God, here it is, and we landed in Australia. So, that's pretty bad. We found out where we were, and we

took off again. We were in Alice Springs--that's in the middle of Australia--so we were really lost. So, we had lunch in Alice Springs, and then we wound up on Northwest Cape. Have you ever been to Northwest Cape, Australia?

Alexander: No.

Abbot: I live in Mobile, Alabama. The sand down there on the Gulf [Coast] is so white and so fine that when you walk on it it squeaks. Everywhere I've ever been in my life, I've gone down to the beach and checked the sand. The only place--the only place--that has sand like that is the Northwest Cape of Australia. But they have poisonous eels, so you can't swim there.

Alexander: Oh, gee.

Abbot: Yep. The Navy had a big communications station there, you know, low frequency stuff [for communication with submarines].

So, then we took off, and I thought: "Boy, we're really lost," because then we landed at Singapore. Well, we were tired then, and the Royal Navy was still there, so they entertained us.

Alexander: What were you flying?

Abbot: A LC-130.

Alexander: So, you were still flying that sucker.

Abbot: That's the way that we got back to the States. We just came back the hard way, that's all.

Alexander: (Chuckle) You were flying it.

Abbot: Yes.

Alexander: Oh, (chuckle) that's why you did then. Okay.

Abbot: Actually, as a matter of fact...no, I swapped off with the plane commander. We'd take turns in the "left seat." The Royal Navy was still in Singapore, and they occupied a great, big lovely quarters up on a hill looking out over the dockyard, and they had nice little reception for us. You know, the old part of Raffles was still there, and I specified a room in the old part. I swear to God that after two martinis you could see the ghost of Somerset Maugham right there in Raffles.

Alexander: (Chuckle) I'll bet that you really could.

Abbot: You really could.

Alexander: (Chuckle) Good gin!

Abbot: Then we started finally getting the direction right, and we came on by the Philippines. We talked to some of the people there, and I got asked to come on out aboard one of the carriers because by then the Vietnam War was getting started. I thought: "I've stretched this thing pretty far now, so maybe I'd better head on back east. (Chuckle) So, we eventually made it back. But that was a wonderful trip back for us in that C-130.

Alexander: I should say so.

Abbot: So, when I finished that job, I was ordered to be Commander, Carrier Division 16. That was homeported in Norfolk first, and then we moved up to Newport, Rhode Island. We were the [Antisubmarine Warfare] Hunter-Killer Force, Atlantic. I had "two hats" [two military responsibilities]. One was as Commander, Carrier Division 16; the other was as Commander, HUKILF--the hunter-killer force. I rode a number of carriers, including the Intrepid and Lexington and Yorktown. We did a deployment that fall to the Baltic [Sea]. You talk about the rough weather! They've got it over there.

Alexander: Yes, indeed.

Abbot: I came back from CARDIV 16 [Carrier Division 16] and was ordered as...I tried very hard to get a "three-ulcer job" at Washington. There was a guy named [Admiral Elmo] Zumwalt...

Alexander: Oh, yes.

Abbot: ...who was the CNO then. He told me that I wasn't going to get any "three-ulcer job." So, I got a job as Inspector General, Atlantic Fleet [based at] Norfolk. I had that job for a year-and-a-half.

I retired, and I was only home for a few weeks, and a guy named Chris Cagle (?)--a vice-admiral--had taken over as CNET, Chief of Naval Education and Training [Pensacola, Florida]. He said that he wanted

to get me ordered back to active duty and take a job that he wanted set up down there. So, I took that. I was ordered back to active duty in the early fall of 1972, and I stayed there in Pensacola in that job until 1 April 1974. That got me retired--re-retired.

Alexander: You re-retired in 1974.

Abbot: I re-retired. That does it. Listen, I raised my right hand [was sworn into active duty in the United States Navy] on June 16, 1935. I swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and serve at the pleasure of the President, and thirty-nine years later the President's pleasure waned!

Alexander: (Chuckle)

Abbot: And I was out!

Alexander: You were gone

Abbot: Yes.

Alexander: Admiral, thank you so much. This has been very nice of you to do this. The Admiral Nimitz Museum is especially grateful for you to do this.

Abbot: Well, listen. I'm afraid that you've got mostly bullshit.

Alexander: No, it was good--very good. Thank you.