

ADMIRAL NIMITZ HISTORIC SITE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with
Dwight Mayo
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Mr. Morris This is Cork Morris. Today is October 11, 2003. I'm interviewing Mr. Dwight Mayo. This interview is taking place at the Bush Museum. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information related to the site.

Dwight, I want to thank you for coming in and speaking with us.

Mr. Mayo Well, it's my pleasure.

Mr. Morris I usually like to start with some of your background, when you were born, who your folks were and what they did.

Mr. Mayo I was born a long time ago in 1919. My parents were midwestern farmers. I grew up in the state of Minnesota. Went to high school there, graduated, and went to work for about five years before World War II came along. And then the war came and grabbed me up.

Mr. Morris Was this after Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Mayo Yes. I first tried to get into the Navy Flight Training Program without the necessary two years of college that they required at the time. But then I was drafted. I had two different notices to report for the draft. But managed, after the Navy had cut out the two years of college requirement, to get enlisted in the V-5 program. And then in October, 1942 went to active duty and went through the Navy Flight Training Program at Minneapolis, and at Pensacola. Graduated with my wings in September of 1943. I transferred to the Marine Corp at that time, which was an option that we had. And then went through Operational Flight Training where I learned to fly the Corsair. And then went to the West Coast and joined the fighter squadron VMF 123. That is the squadron that I was with on the USS Bennington for six months in 1945 where I personally knew, very briefly, one Earl Vaughn who is one of the eight that were executed on the Island of Chichi Jima. We finished our tour, and came back to the States. We were headed then for another squadron. We would qualify aboard a CVE, and go out and support the initial landings on _____ which was scheduled for the first of November, 1945.

Mr. Morris What sort of plane was that?

Mr. Mayo That was a Corsair. We were flying a Corsair all the time on the Bennington. We would have gone into the F6 Hellcat for the later phase of the war. But, of course, the war ended and we didn't have to do that. And I continued on in the Marine Corp. I got a regular commission and stayed on for twenty years. Retired as a major in 1962. That's essentially my career in the military. Since that time, I went five years to graduate school. I got my doctorate in History at the University of Oklahoma. And then joined the faculty at Northern Arizona University at Flagstaff. And spent 16 years as a full time faculty member, historian there. And part time after that. I've been retired from there for twenty years already, but I'm not through yet. I'm presently engaged in co-authoring a book in the history of geological theory, which is kind of an esoteric field I understand, but it's a fun project. And at my age it's just wonderful to have something like that to do. So that's essentially my life.

Mr. Morris Arizona's a great place to be studying that too.

Mr. Mayo Oh yes it certainly is.

Mr. Morris What sort of missions were you flying during the war.

Mr. Mayo Off the Bennington we flew all sorts of things. We did a lot of combat air patrol over the fleet. We did quite a number of strike missions where we dropped bombs and shot rockets, and of course, we were used as a fighter-bomber, essentially. We sometimes escorted flights of Navy TBM's and _____ bomber type. So we got in all sorts of stuff. And then occasionally we would go on a fighter sweep, as well. One such fighter sweep on the 19th of March 1945, we ran into some very severe Japanese fighter opposition.

Mr. Morris What year was this?

Mr. Mayo This was 1945. Incidentally, I have written a paper about that particular mission, and I would be very happy to include a copy of that paper when we get the revision going. There is also, if anyone is interested, there is a journal called, "Yellow Sheet" which is published by the Marine Corp Aviation Association (MCAA). And in the spring issue, it's a quarterly, there's an article about this same flight describing the squadron - the opposition to us on that. We were 15 airplanes, and we were hit

by about 30 of the latest Japanese fighters flown by very experienced pilots. And we had some serious trouble. Two of our fellows were shot down. We confirmed 10 killed in the melee. Of the 13 of us that got back, only 4 did not have battle damage. My experience there is well described in this paper that I'll submit.

Mr. Morris OK. Where was this?

Mr. Mayo This was over the inland sea near the _____ Naval Base which is a big Japanese Naval Base on Honshu. It's about 50 miles southeast of Hiroshima. And Hiroshima was our destination that day.

Mr. Morris Oh, never made it that far?

Mr. Mayo Never made it. We put in this full carrier tour with Air Group 82, Navy Air Group. And why were Marines aboard carriers at this time? It had to do with the aircraft, the Corsair. It had been developed as the Navy carrier-fighter early in the war. And they tried to squadron them on one of the carriers in 1943, but it had certain defects that they were not able to use it successfully. They had too many deck crashes with it. Then we gave it to the Marines who used it very successfully in the southwest Pacific there. Later on they made some modifications to the aircraft that made it a good carrier aircraft in late 1944. And they wanted to get them back on the carriers because it was the best fighter we had. They didn't have any Navy squadron to train them and there was about 10 or 12 Marine Squadrons out in the West Coast that were fully trained and had no place to go. We had too many of us. So they gave us carrier qualifications and away we went as a part of the Navy. And that was my combat tour.

Mr. Morris What does carrier operations consist of? Teaching you how to fly and land off the carrier?

Mr. Mayo The rest of our training, fighter tactics and all that kind of stuff, was standard and we knew those. The Navy and the Marine Corps use the same airplanes, the same tactics, the same everything, the same flight school. But it takes some special training to be able to fly on to the carrier, particularly. It takes a lot of practice. I have about 135 landings aboard a carrier. In preparation for that, we did what is called field carrier landing

practice, where they'd mark off a spot on an airstrip with a landing signal officer down there, and we'd just practice following the signals and doing the pattern right. I computed one day that I'd done about 450 approaches and landings on a field to prepare for these 135 carrier landings.

Mr. Morris I would assume that landing on a field that doesn't pitch and yaw is a lot different.

Mr. Mayo That's correct. There are differences. But that's the best preparation that you can get other than doing the actual thing. This, of course, now is a whole lot different than it was in 1945. The whole system is just revolutionized with the angle deck carriers and the new techniques. It's a different ballgame.

Mr. Morris I've spoken to a lot of Viet Nam era pilots, and the majority of those say that the minute they took off, it really didn't matter what their mission was or how scary that might be, the only thing they thought about was how scary it was going to be to land back on that carrier.

Mr. Mayo Yes, that's probably it. Sometimes it's called a "Controlled Crash." At the same time when you're highly trained as we were, it became just second nature. We did it.

Mr. Morris What was your initial training like? What were the trainers you used when you first started out?

Mr. Mayo When we first started in the flight-training program, we flew the N2S as the Navy called it, Stearman Biplane. The Air Corps used that same airplane, I'm sure. And then we went into primarily the S and J which Air Corps people called T6. And used those aircraft all through our flight training program. When we graduated and got our wings, then I transferred to the Marine Corps, and we went into operational types. And I went directly into the Corsair from that process. And believe me, jumping from a T6 to a Corsair is a big leap. In the T6 you have an instructor who can show you what to do. But in the Corsair, you're all by yourself. It was quite an experience.

Mr. Morris The performance is greatly enhanced in the Corsair.

Mr. Mayo Greatly is right.

- Mr. Morris Was all your flight time in the Pacific on a carrier?
- Mr. Mayo Yes.
- Mr. Morris What was living on a ship like?
- Mr. Mayo It's a plush way to fight a war. We had good quarters. We had good food, steaks and all that kind of stuff all the time. We had room boys who made our bunks and did our laundry, and all that kind of stuff. It was kind of an elitist way of living and as I look back on it I feel rather guilty about being treated so well. But it was scary at other times too. When you see a kamikaze coming down and hitting the water so close to the fantail of the ship that it jams the rudders temporarily and pieces of the airplane fly up on the deck.....
- Mr. Morris Did this happen on the Bennington?
- Mr. Mayo Yes it did. As a matter of fact, I was talking, yesterday, to the fellow that was our landing signal officer there. He was at the reunion that I was at in San Antonio this weekend. And he said that when that airplane hit he was up at his position on the flight deck and a piece of the airplane flew up and hit him in the chest. Didn't hurt him, but it was a surprise. And it was a scary time. When we arrived in the Western Pacific in January of '45 at the Big Fleet Anchorage at the Ulithi Atoll, about 12 to 15 of our large fast carriers were in a line there. Over the next six months, all except one of those carriers had been hit by a kamikaze air bomb at one time or another. And the one that escaped that was the Bennington. We never got hit.
- Mr. Morris Was flight operations different from ship's operations? Was there a definite line between those two?
- Mr. Mayo Yes, I forgotten exactly what they called it now. But those persons who had to do with the operations of the aircraft were more or less a separate organization from the ones who operated the ship and did all the servicing and so forth; although there is necessarily a great deal of cooperation between them. I didn't know the specifics of the organization of the whole ship's company. We had our own little world to consider and to work with. And it was all consuming. That was our whole life. There must have been a great deal of stress involved. In six and a half months we were aboard the Bennington, though we had the best

of food and such, I lost 30 pounds without even thinking about it. And I've had other people say the same thing. That it was probably a matter of stress. Unfortunately, my squadron, VMF123, suffered severe casualties. We started out with 27 pilots. And we'd been flying together for a year. And only 18 of those 27 returned. We lost 9 of the original 27, and we lost 4 of the replacements that came aboard, including one Earl Vaughn who's one of the subjects of the book, "Flyboys." James Bradley just told us about it. Incidentally, I've read it cover to cover.

Mr. Morris Would you like to give me a brief synopsis of that story because I've never heard it?

Mr. Mayo It's a powerful book, believe me. He starts off, almost half of the book is laying the foundation of the incidents aboard the island of Chichi Jima. A lot of background - historical background. And building up the story of what the Japanese called spirit warriors. This is not the samurai tradition. Many people think it was. But it was a separate feeling that had been growing during the earlier part of the century where this cadre, large numbers of the Japanese military, built the belief that they were invincible and that they were capable of achieving just about anything. And Bradley goes into a whole lot of that to start off with. Then he builds the story of the role of we aviators in the Pacific War. And not only the aviators, but the air crewmen and various sorts, and what our role was. And ultimately he gets down to the story of these eight individuals who were shot down in the vicinity of Chichi Jima. Chichi Jima is a small island about 150 miles north of Iwo Jima. The story includes the future president of the United States, George Bush, who was shot down at Chichi Jima. That's something that I learned from this book that I didn't know. I knew he'd gotten shot down, but I didn't know where. But he was one of the fortunate ones in that he was rescued by an American submarine. The eight that were captured there, lived periods of time - some of them were treated quite well for the period that they were captive. Warren Earl Vaughn, for instance, was befriended by a Japanese communications person and had a good relationship with him and was treated quite well until the day he was taken up and his head was chopped off - executed. And all eight of these were beheaded at one time or another or in a couple of cases, I think; they were simply stabbed to death. Bradley has gotten access to the records of the trial of the personnel that were on Chichi Jima that had captured these

people and executed them. And it was a pretty gruesome story, believe me. If you have a weak stomach, don't read the book. But it was a very realistic book and he's done just a great job. I think it's one of the best-written books I've ever read. I was impressed by his "Flags of our Fathers" also. I was in communication with Bradley before I read "Flags of our Fathers." And I've been in communication with him occasionally since; simply because I was a squadron mate of Warren Earl Vaughn who's one of the eight who was executed. And then he goes on and gives details about that. I was reading especially the first part of this. I developed a feeling almost of hatred of the Japanese for all the atrocities that they had committed one place or another. And we had that kind of a feeling during World War II. We grew to at least dislike the Japanese. They were the enemy. Then, later in my Marine Corps career, I served a year at the Marine Corps Air Station at Iwo Kuni Japan where I was the Civilian Personnel Officer of the Air Station and we had some 2000 Japanese employees. My office staff was all Japanese. And I got to admire them, know them, they were wonderful people. So I developed a liking for the Japanese, respect for them. Then I read the first half of Bradley's book and kind of switched back to the old feeling for a while. Then I started to realize that there are two sides to any story, that there were lots of Japanese who can be credited with acts of kindness towards American prisoners in spite of all the horror stories that you read. So I'm now back where I'm not hating the Japanese any more.

Mr. Morris I find that lot's of veterans say the same thing. Saying that they never thought they would ever like anything Japanese, and yet here I am driving a Subaru.

Mr. Mayo Yeah, that's what I drive, a Subaru too.

Mr. Morris How would you rate the Japanese as pilots?

Mr. Mayo They, at the beginning of the war, had some very superbly trained pilots, excellent. And there were a few of them left at the end of the war. And on that one mission that I mentioned on the 19th of March 1945, we ran into about 30 of them. They were trained instructor pilots and they were led, I don't remember the name of the fellow now; but the fellow that led that flight that day was one of the leaders of the flights on the attack at Pearl Harbor. And he shot down something like 25 or

30 American planes. So we had some severe opposition. They were as good as we were. And some of their later aircraft were very good also. The reason that we came out on top is that we had more, just as good, and when we lost something, lost a ship, lost an aircraft, we could replace it; and they couldn't. They couldn't train new pilots like we could. The preponderance of logistics and that sort of thing won the war for us. Certainly we were screwed up in lots of instances, made lots of mistakes, had some poor leadership, but all in all we just were a little bit better. I've always thought that we won the war because we could throw more junk at them than they can throw at us.

Mr. Morris That might be a metaphor for most wars.

Mr. Mayo Yes, I think so.

Mr. Morris I've actually heard other people say that the Japanese equipment got worse during the war. You don't seem to feel that way.

Mr. Mayo Well, in many ways, probably so. Because in most instances they were unable to improve on their technology. They just didn't have the whole establishment that was able to do it like we were. But they did have some of it. In the later part of the war they came out with some very superior fighters - The George, the Jack, and one other. They were superior aircraft and they were well armored, well armed good aircraft and flown by expert pilots. But there were just a few of them. They couldn't possibly prevail.

Mr. Morris Since you mentioned reunions, I assume you are still in contact with a lot of your squadron members?

Mr. Mayo Well not a lot of them because there are not very many of them left. Yes, we had two Marine Squadrons on the Bennington: VMF 123, which was my squadron, and VMF 112. And we have a joint reunion. We've been having one every year for several years. I've only attended a couple of them. But they're nice occasions. We're planning one for next year again.

Mr. Morris Were you married when you went in the service?

Mr. Mayo Not when I went in. As aviation cadets we had to be single. And if we married as a cadet, we'd be thrown out of the program.

But after I graduated and went through operational flight training I did get married and was married all during the rest of the war. Then during my whole 20 years in the Marine Corps, we moved around and raised a family and that usual stuff.

Mr. Morris When you were assigned to the Western Pacific did you ever get a leave in order to come home, or to Hawaii or anything like that?

Mr. Mayo No, you're speaking about the tour on the Bennington? Occasionally we would go back down to the big fleet anchorage at the Ulithi, and we'd have a few days that we could go ashore. They had a liberty island they called _____. And we'd go ashore and they'd have a bar set up and that sort of a thing. But no, not back to the States. We were only out there six and a half months. It was a short, but very intense tour.

Mr. Morris Six and a half months is quite a while, especially under that sort of pressure.

Mr. Mayo Yes, but you think of a lot of these people in the infantry, the Marine Ground Units would be out there for two or three years without ever getting home and going on campaign after campaign. That's tough.

Mr. Morris They talk nowadays, especially in the current conflict about the stresses on the soldiers and airmen. Obviously those stresses had to be there when you were doing it. Do you feel that they made any effort to counsel you on any of these or to give you any sort of psychological counseling?

Mr. Mayo No. I don't remember anything of that sort. No. If a person was very religiously oriented, which I was not, maybe going and talking to your chaplain, whether you're a protestant or a Catholic, you might get some counseling there, but nothing organized at all. We just didn't think about that.

Mr. Morris Did you talk about it among yourselves?

Mr. Mayo Oh, hell yes, all the time. We were a pretty close-knit bunch, really. I think.

Mr. Morris Weather?

Mr. Mayo Weather sometimes was a problem. We occasionally flew in some bad weather. But not as modern day pilots can fly and be effective with all of the radar and target acquisition equipment and so forth. Ours was just plain old visual flight operations and visual target identification and all that sort of stuff. But once in a while we got caught in some weather, but it wasn't particularly a problem. Although for our task group, one day, it was a problem in that this famous admiral who in my estimation was more infamous than famous, Bull Halsey, ran our task group through a severe typhoon, and did a lot of damage to ships and airplanes. Had it happened early in the war, it would have been a disaster. But that had nothing to do with our aviation activities really. That was ship captains and admirals who had the problem there.

Mr. Morris How did you feel about your officers?

Mr. Mayo Well, that's kind of a mixed bag. You're speaking about the officers in the squadron?

Mr. Morris Yes.

Mr. Mayo Well, all of our pilots were officers, of course. I was a second lieutenant when we went out. I did make first lieutenant during the cruise on the Bennington. We had a squadron commander when we went out who was an academy graduate and had been an artillery officer, I believe, and then while he was a major, got orders and went through Navy Flight Training Program and became an aviator. And since he was a fairly senior major, why he was just senior enough to become a squadron commander. And he had no more flight time and experience than we second lieutenants had. He was in a sense a rather stupid man in that he didn't face up to the realities of actual combat. And he told us one time that he was either going to come back from this war as a hero, or he wasn't going to come back at all. Well, he tried to dogfight with a Japanese Zeke, which most people call a Zero, and the Corsair couldn't do that. We had other tactics. And he tried to dogfight with one of them and he was shot out of the air. Didn't come back. Our executive officer then was an older fellow but who had no combat experience and I flew with him most of the time. We flew in four plane divisions, and each division was divided into two sections. And I led the second section with our new squadron commander. And he was overly cautious and I think we didn't do as good a job as we should have if we'd had

really good leadership. That's being critical a long time after the fact. But, I think there was general agreement to that effect.

Mr. Morris Given the relative unpreparedness for the war, were there good squadron commanders out there?

Mr. Mayo Oh yeah, the one that commanded the MF112 was a good leader, very experienced, and their squadron did better than ours did.

Mr. Morris Did you guys compete? Squadrons compete?

Mr. Mayo Only in the sense that they shot down more airplanes than we did, and that was sort of a black eye. No, there wasn't really that much competition. We were too busy.

Mr. Morris Did your squadron or you personally ever do a bombing?

Mr. Mayo Oh yes. We did quite a bit.

Mr. Morris How effective was Japanese anti aircraft? Was this over the homeland or islands?

Mr. Mayo Both. In some cases quite effective, and other cases they shot a lot of lead that never did any damage. It was a problem to be reckoned with at all times. It was kind of scary.

Mr. Morris I'm sure of that.

Mr. Mayo Red meat balls coming at you. Once you saw them, it was too late to do anything.

Mr. Morris Toward the end of the war, over the homeland, could you sense any sort of last ditch feeling that the Japanese were getting; who they were sending up to fight you in planes, or their massive amounts of anti aircraft?

Mr. Mayo No, not really. When you're up flying a plane by yourself, of course you're with a bunch of other aircraft, you don't get the feeling of much of what's going on in the ground because you're too remote from it. In a sense a very clean way to fight a war is to be up there driving an airplane. Of course, it's also a dangerous way to do it, as we well know.

- Mr. Morris Did you ever liaise with any others like the British or anybody, or was it all American?
- Mr. Mayo It was all Americans. There were in that time period British carriers operating in the western Pacific, but we had no contact with them and we never did any joint operations. This doesn't mean that it didn't go on. But our task group didn't have that opportunity.
- Mr. Morris You were on a carrier all this time. I guess you didn't get a lot of USO shows or entertainment.
- Mr. Mayo No. Just work. We did listen once in a while to Tokyo Rose which was interesting. Because we just sneered at her. It was almost ludicrous what she had to say once in a while. It was entertainment for us more than anything. But that's about the only kind of entertainment we had.
- Mr. Morris Was there any period of time in the Pacific that was more difficult than another?
- Mr. Mayo Yes, there was one period in March and April and maybe into May where we were up in action for a sustained period of six weeks. And this is the longest period in history up to that time that the major fleet unit, task force 58, had been out operating continuously for six weeks. That got pretty stressful because we were doing a lot of flying. I was in the cockpit as much as eight and a half hours a day. That wears you down after a while. Of course, we had a refueling cycle about every four or five days and that gave us a day's rest. We had a little procedure after each strike mission. We were eligible to go down to sickbay and draw two ounces of brandy. It was a special privilege for we flyboys. And we arranged with the flight surgeon to save up our portion during those four days of operations and then we'd go and draw the whole amount that was due to us for that period of time, and have a little party then. So that was something that was a little different than most of the people on the ship got.
- Mr. Morris Did you ever have any trying emotional experiences? Or was it all just a trying experience?
- Mr. Mayo Every time we lost one of our pilots, of course, it was emotionally distressing. I got accustomed to that fairly early. My own kid brother who went through flight school with me at

about the same time was also a Corsair pilot. He was killed in a training accident at El Toro in January of 1944. That was a devastating blow. Then losing all these pilots was another thing. Then one day I had to land aboard with the gear up and no flaps and had half of the horizontal tail structure shot off. That was kind of a stressful experience. Incidentally, I have a VCR tape of that landing. And I have some pictures of it. I'll include pictures with article.

Mr. Morris How do you stop an airplane with no wheels? Did the hook work?

Mr. Mayo Yes. When you lost hydraulic pressure as I did the tail wheel and the landing hook come down into place. And so you've always got a hook. But the emergency landing gear extension was also shot out. Since I had no hydraulic pressure I couldn't get the wing flaps down. Landed fast. Got airsick. And, oh, I was cold and shivering and shaking and it was a miserable damn flight, I'll tell you. But I recovered from that all right.

Mr. Morris How long did you have to fly the plane in that condition before you got back to the carrier?

Mr. Mayo Well, I got back to the carrier fairly soon; maybe half and hour or forty-five minutes after I got hit. When the portion of the tail broke loose, I was in a very steep turn, and that tail must have had a slug through the main sparring _____ of the horizontal tail sections and then the whole thing broke off. And that threw me into a very violent invert spin which I managed to recover from after loosing about 9,000 feet of altitude. And got leveled out and found out that the engine was not damaged. I was all alone. I flew back to the task group which I had no trouble finding. But then I had to stay airborne for almost two hours before I finally got aboard. That was a miserable time, believe me.

Mr. Morris How come?

Mr. Mayo Well first of all when I got back we were scheduled for a three-hour flight. And I was back in about an hour and a half. Then the rest of the flight came back very soon after I got there. And we were out in a sector in an orbit, which was the standard procedure. When we got back there was a bunch of airplanes on the flight deck getting ready for takeoff. And after a while the

pilots came up and they warmed up and they got launched. And we thought, "Oh, maybe we'll get aboard now." No, elevators started going up and down and they brought up a bunch more airplanes. Got them ready to launch for a strike somewhere. And then finally they started taking our flight aboard. They took about four aboard and then they had a bogie in the area. And they sent us out about 15 miles away to avoid our own aircraft _____. And after a while they called us back and about four more got aboard. And then they called us back in finally, and took the rest of us aboard. And I was the last one.

Mr. Morris Did they know what shape you were in?

Mr. Mayo Yes, because I had told them. And I had to make three passes. In the meantime I jettisoned my belly tank and tried to lower my landing gear and it wouldn't come down. In that condition, especially the condition of the aircraft and the condition of my stomach, I wasn't a very efficient flyer at that moment. And I made two passes and got a wave off because I just wasn't in position for landing. And finally on the third pass I got to cut, and went ahead and landed. In the normal situation, there are about ten arresting cables stretched across the deck. And normally we would catch on the second or third or fourth wire as we called it and that would stop us. Up front of this landing area there were a series of what we called barriers. There were five of them. And each of these barriers consisted of two cables about this far apart mounted up oh maybe eight feet above the deck and hooked to a stanchion on either side. And those stanchions would fold down and those cables would come down on the deck so you could taxi or _____ and so forth. But those cables were essentially arresting cables. They had the same mechanism and there were five of them. And they usually had two or three of them up for landing. And if you flew into that barrier, it would stop you. And that's what happened to me. I think I got a wire, but I also flew into the barrier. It just stopped me and the airplane skidded sideways and there I was. And I climbed rapidly out. I wasn't injured at all.

Mr. Morris Would that plane be considered totaled?

Mr. Mayo They just picked it up and dropped it over the side. It was beyond repair.

Mr. Morris You talked before about combat tactics and how you didn't go head to head with a zero, could you briefly go through how would you approach if you were caught with a zero?

Mr. Mayo Well, our basic formation was a four-plane division as I mentioned before. It had two sections of two aircraft each. When we got into a combat situation, the two sections would separate at a distance where we could turn into the other section. And we could weave back and forth. And that way we could shoot at airplanes that were attacking this section. It was a very effective defensive tactic developed by a Navy flyer named Jimmy Thatch early in the war. It was called the Thatch Weave. And this is very standard and very effective. And that's what we used in the melee on the 19th of March. And that's why 13 of us got back. If we had tried to dogfight these people, why probably most of us would have gone down.

Mr. Morris Was the Zero just a faster plane?

Mr. Mayo The Zero is a little bit of a misnomer because the Zero referred to a design year. And there were several different aircraft that bore the Zero name. But we had worked out a series of nicknames for these particular aircraft and what most people call a Zero, we call a Zeke. And that was their standard fighter earlier in the war. And there's still a lot of them around. That aircraft was lighter – it didn't have self-sealing gas tanks no armor plate. And it had the ability to climb, to zoom at least, faster than we could. It could turn inside of us. Therefore we developed, the Americans, developed this weaving tactic, which was very effective. If there was a Zeke on our tail, we'd shove our nose down and make a right turn. And the Zeke couldn't stay with us in that turn and that dive. We could dive away from them. And furthermore, our airplanes were pretty tough compared to theirs. All you had to do with them was to get in one good round and usually it would blow up. They were pretty vulnerable.

Mr. Morris Where were you when the war was over?

Mr. Mayo Actually we were back in the States. We got back to San Francisco on about the 20th of July. Then they sent us on 30 days leave and I was back in Minnesota with my parents when the war ended. It was almost unbelievable that it had stopped. Because we were facing up to the invasion of Kyushu in

November and they reorganized us into a new squadron to go back. And we were to transition into the Hellcats and in a couple of months get re-qualified on a jeep carrier and go back out to support the initial landings on Kyushu. We didn't worry so much about it then, but as I have learned about the jeep carriers in the years since in the reading I've done and the studying, that would have been a bloody thing. The Japanese, according to figures I have read, had some 3500 kamikaze aircraft they were going to use against the initial invasion fleet. And our own estimates were that 40% of those two thousand ships in the invasion fleet would be hit by kamikazes. And the jeep carriers had no armor plating. They had no three inches of armor plate on the hanger deck as the big carriers did. And when a kamikaze hit those, it would go down the bowls of the ship and just blow it up. So, I was glad the war ended when it did.

Mr. Morris The war's over, did you ever have any second thoughts about not staying with the Corps?

Mr. Mayo Well, not about staying with the Corps as such, but I did have thoughts about going on inactive duty, which I could have done. And be in the reserves and go to college and that kind of thing. But I changed my mind. I had applied for and got a regular commission. And so I'd stay on for twenty at least, which I did.

Mr. Morris At that time did they tell everybody about using the atomic bomb, or did this come out later?

Mr. Mayo We knew that such a weapon had been used right away. We didn't know anything about what an atomic bomb was or how it worked or anything. That kind of information soon became available.

Mr. Morris I interviewed a fellow who was a prisoner of war in Hiroshima on the other side of the bay. We were talking and he said well then the war ended. I asked him if there wasn't a really big explosion along this point and he said his point was that they bombed it so much all the time that it was just another explosion as far as they were concerned. Of course they were not free to wander around and look at stuff.

Mr. Mayo In 1961 I was assigned duty at Iwo Kuni which was 35 miles from Hiroshima. And on our civilian staff there, well actually we operated a dependent school on the Marine Corps Air Station on

Iwo Kuni. And I got acquainted with the woman who taught Japanese, she was a Japanese woman, taught Japanese to American children who were in school there. She was a Hiroshima native. She was 13 years old when the bomb blew and she was working in some kind of an automotive assembly plant on the east side of Hiroshima. But there's a big ridgeline between where she was and the main part of the city where the bomb hit. I don't remember that she said anything about an unusual bomb, but she did say that all able bodied people that were available were recruited to go over and assist the wounded, which was a pretty gruesome experience for a thirteen year old girl. She still had horrible memories about it. She was not injured and suffered no effects from radiation.

Mr. Morris Is there anything else you'd like to throw in here?

Mr. Mayo This is a World War II installation here. I did have more combat experience after World War II, in Korea. In that conflict I was in VMO6, which we called an observation squadron. We flew L19's. L19's are essentially a Cessna 180 with a souped up engine that was altered for military use. The squadron was under the operational control of the First Marine Division. We did such things as carry Artillery Officers whose spotted controlled artillery fire. We carried tactical observers who were out after information. We were experienced fighter pilots, the ones that were in that squadron, and we occasionally controlled an air strike from the air going after targets that were not visible to the ground people. That was probably as stressful a combat experience as my World War II was. Unarmed, our mechanics, maintenance crew found some armor plate and they had a piece cut to fit down the back of the seat and another one underneath the seat and that was our total protection. But that squadron had been in Korea when I joined it and they had had one airplane shot down in two years. In the three and a half months that I was in the squadron to get my 100 missions, we lost six airplanes. They were shot down. And I had more lead thrown at me there than I ever did in the Corsair. That was a tense time, and I was glad to get away from that one.

Mr. Morris Did you fly those off land bases?

Mr. Mayo Yes, I did. We were up with the First Division. We had an airstrip about ten miles behind there.

- Mr. Morris How many people in a squadron?
- Mr. Mayo In that one we had a combined squadron. We had twelve of the L19's and we had twelve Bell Helicopters. You've seen the pictures in the movie M.A.S.H. And you've seen those helicopters. That's what we had in our squadron. They were used mostly for medical evac. I was not a helicopter pilot so that was a separate operation. But between the two segments of the squadron we probably had about thirty pilots, about fifteen in each.
- Mr. Morris Did you ever try to fly a helicopter?
- Mr. Mayo I had some rides up – they fly in the right seat – and sometimes I got a ride in the left seat. And they let me control the stick for a while. That was something else again.
- Mr. Morris From what I understand it's a whole different ball game, whole different aeronautical principles going on.
- Mr. Mayo Yes, it is.
- Mr. Morris When did you retire?
- Mr. Mayo First of November 1962. I've been retired for more than forty years from that. Then became a college professor and I'm retired from that too.
- Mr. Morris You had a whole other career ahead of you somewhere?
- Mr. Mayo Doing a little writing now, so that's a new and exciting experience.
- Mr. Morris You tell a good story. Write it down. I'll buy the book. Well I guess that should do it. That pretty much covers it. I appreciate you talking with us. And I appreciate you fighting that war as horrible as it must have been.
- Mr. Mayo I've got a one sentence statement in Bradley's book, and it's a statement to the affect that there were things that we had to do, were expected to do and we didn't think too much about it, we just went ahead and did it. And that's all I can say about motivation for going to war. It was a part of our life, and unavoidable.

Tape 998
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