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*Interview with Joseph Hafter
U.S. Air Force*

Interview with Joseph Hafter

Interviewed by Ed Metzler

This is Ed Metzler and today in April 18, 2005. I am interviewing Mr. Joseph Hafter. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. 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 historic information related to this site. Let me start out, Joe by thanking you for taking your time out of your schedule to discuss your war experiences with us and allow us to add to our archives. Let me asked you to start out by telling us when and where you were born and a little bit about your family, your parents and high school and things like that.

Mr. Hafter: Well I was born in Dallas, Texas and that was on January 17, 1919. I came up from a family of eight children. Went to school, elementary school, high school in Dallas. Graduated from both. Then I had to go to work in 1937 when I graduated. My father was sick, so I had to help support the family.

Mr. Metzler: What did your dad do for a living?

Mr. Hafter: He was a traveling salesman.

Mr. Metzler: What did he sell?

Mr. Hafter: He sold garments. In those days there were called, anything from socks on up to sweaters, haberdasheries. He traveled Texas and New Mexico, Oklahoma and Mississippi. In those days that was tough traveling.

Mr. Metzler: They didn't have the interstate highway system.

Mr. Hafter: No. Dad would come home about every six, or eight, weeks. And then he would stay home for quite awhile and then a new line would come out and he would take off again.

Mr. Metzler: So you graduated from High School and you went to work to help the family, is that right?

Mr. Hafter: That's correct. My first job was at Inan (?) Metal Company pitching iron, scrap iron. In the summer time you wore gloves because the steel was so hot and in the wintertime you wore gloves because the steel was so cold. Your fingers would stick to it.

Mr. Metzler: Doesn't sound like an easy job.

Mr. Hafter: Well, it was a job, in those days. I gradually changed jobs, changed jobs, changed jobs and my last job, before I went into the service, was with a Nordis (?) Sportswear. They manufactured sportswear for the ladies. I was the head of

the shipping department. War came out on December 7 and I tried to enlist in the Marines. Couldn't enlist in the Marines because I was flat footed. I couldn't pass the Navy exam, so I went to the Air Force and they took me immediately.

Mr. Metzler: Now tell me how you found out about Pearl Harbor? Were you at home, or.....?

Mr. Hafter: I was at home just sitting around the house on a Sunday with, the whole family used to get together on a Sunday. Those that were married all ready would come over and mother would.....we all have a big table around there and fifteen to sixteen people would sit around the table and eat. That's how we found out about Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Metzler: What was the impact on the group?

Mr. Hafter: Stun. Dazed. Nothing was hardly said from what I remembered for quite awhile. Then dad said, "Well looks like we're going to have to be doing our duty."

Mr. Metzler: You were about twenty-two or twenty-three when that happened, huh?

Mr. Hafter: Approximately, yes.

Mr. Metzler: So you got into the Air Force?

Mr. Hafter: I got into the Air Force and my first station was Shepherd (?) Field, Texas. We took our tests there and was sent to radio school in Scotfield, (?) Illinois. Right out of Saint Louis. Radio school.

Mr. Metzler: Is that something you were interested in, or did they pick it out for you?

Mr. Hafter: No, they.....on the aptitude test they said that's what I'd be best suited for, so they sent me to radio school. It was...I stayed there quite sometime and got there, I think it was, February of '43 and I left there in August of '43. I was put into a....I was supposed to go overseas to England as Air Transport Command radio operator. I had, they caught, a hernia on me in my flight exam and I had to have an operation. When that operation was over I could go back to work, to duty, that job had been filled all ready, so they sent me to Colorado Springs Air Base photo-recon unit. That's where I, we stayed for quite a while and then we got orders to go overseas. We went over on a ship called, *Klip Fontaine*, (?) which was a Dutch freighter.

Mr. Metzler: When did you depart, then, for overseas?

Mr. Hafter: Departed for overseas on October the first, right around in that area of '43.

Mr. Metzler: OK. So October, '43.

- Mr. Hafter:** We were due to into Guadalcanal, but the big Naval battle was taking place at that time around the first of November. They switched us to New Caledonia where we stayed before we could go to Guadalcanal. We landed on Guadalcanal January 6 of '43.
- Mr. Metzler:** Of '43?
- Mr. Hafter:** '43, yeah.
- Mr. Metzler;** So you left in October '43?
- Mr. Hafter:** '42. Pardon me.
- Mr. Metzler:** What was New Caledonia like? Were you just sitting there waiting, or....
- Mr. Hafter:** Well, we....met (?) the train, I mean, we didn't have our planes with us at that time. In the photo recon they flew in a little later on. But we just made camp and just did nothing. Did nothing.
- Mr. Metzler:** What was New Caledonia like?
- Mr. Hafter:** You know, I can't remember too.....the only thing I remember about New Caledonia was the fact that they had public baths downtown. We didn't have any showers at our area so we would have to go downtown to take our baths. You had taken a bath and, all of a sudden, some gal would stand next to you and was taking a shower to. It was common in New Caledonia.
- Mr. Metzler:** Different culture?
- Mr. Hafter:** Completely different.
- Mr. Metzler:** Now, you said, "Go into town..." What town?
- Mr. Hafter:** Noumea. Noumea, New Caledonia. That's where we were stationed, out of it. We were stationed in the hills.
- Mr. Metzler:** Now you were with a group that had all ready been formed?
- Mr. Hafter:** Yes. The Seventeenth Photo Recon. That's who I went overseas with. We flew P-38s and, instead of having guns, we had cameras in the ships.
- Mr. Metzler:** But the P-38 hadn't actually arrived yet? Is that what I heard you say?
- Mr. Hafter:** Yes. They hadn't arrived yet.
- Mr. Metzler:** So you were just in a, literally, a holding pattern all around.

- Mr. Hafter:** They were due to come into Guadalcanal and so; they were stymied to, so they couldn't fly into Guadalcanal.
- Mr. Metzler:** Yeah. The Guadalcanal campaign turned out to be a rather lengthily one, as I remember. You finally went in there in January?
- Mr. Hafter:** January 6, 1943.
- Mr. Metzler:** So tell me about going into Guadalcanal.
- Mr. Hafter:** We only had one air raid going into Guadalcanal, thank goodness. They dropped their bombs one time; the Japs came in. But, they weren't near us.....near our ship.
- Mr. Metzler:** What ship were you on?
- Mr. Hafter:** *Klip Fontaine.*
- Mr. Metzler:** This is still the same ship?
- Mr. Hafter:** Still the same ship.
- Mr. Metzler:** Do you know how to spell that?
- Mr. Hafter:** No.....K-L-I-P F-O-N-T-A-I-N-E, I think it is.
- Mr. Metzler:** And that was a Dutch ship?
- Mr. Hafter:** Dutch. Dutch freighter. Close quarters. We slept on deck every night instead of being below deck. It was cooler and nicer, due to the fact that there were too many seasick boys. So we stayed on deck and we, that iron deck became pretty nice.
- Mr. Metzler:** Were you ever bothered by seasickness?
- Mr. Hafter:** Never. When I was going overseas, out of San Francisco, I was talking to a sailor and I asked him about seasickness. He said, "Son." He says, "Son, when you're on a ship, you never look down. You look at the horizon. And you will never get sick. The horizon doesn't bob up and down. When you look straight down, that goes up and down, then you get sea sick." So I have never been seasick. I had some good advice.
- Mr. Metzler:** You didn't have that much time on ship anyhow.
- Mr. Hafter:** No. We were on the ship thirty days.

- Mr. Metzler:** So you set up camp, then, in Guadalcanal. Tell me about that. I mean how was that.....
- Mr. Hafter:** We set up in the coconut groves, between coconut trees. They were lined just beautifully and we just set up our tents between those and dug our foxholes immediately.
- Mr. Metzler:** Was Guadalcanal secure at that point.
- Mr. Hafter:** Not yet. They were still fighting. We set up a perimeter around our camp to with our guards. They would try to infiltrate every now and then, but we held them off.
- Mr. Metzler:** Did they try and do that at night?
- Mr. Hafter:** Oh yes, at night.
- Mr. Metzler:** Any experience you had there with any of that infiltration?
- Mr. Hafter:** No. Thank goodness, I was able to sleep through most of it. When we weren't in the foxholes, on account of those bombers every night.
- Mr. Metzler:** So the bombers would come in every night?
- Mr. Hafter:** Every night. That was their duty. They would just come in just to aggravate us and keep us awake and wear us down, which they did; but it was every night; two, or three, times a night, because they weren't too far away from Guadalcanal in New Georgia, which was their big base there. They would come in every night.
- Mr. Metzler:** So what happened then?
- Mr. Hafter:** In the squadron I was in, I wasn't making any headway. We were all brand new overseas and the Seventieth Fighter Squadron was across the runway from us on fighter two strip (?) and I happened to know a fellow there from Dallas. We got together and he said, "Hey, transfer over here. You can transfer in grade." I was just a corporal at that time. He said I could transfer in grade. "We need radio men." So I talked to them and I transferred over to the Seventieth Fighter Squadron, which was a very good thing for me. They were, most of them, were old men there already that had been overseas for quite a while in the Fiji Islands before they hit Guadalcanal. So they had started rotating back to the States a little later on and as they rotated, it made higher grades. I became a Master Sergeant.
- Mr. Metzler:** OK. Now you were, did you say a radioman?

- Mr. Hafter:** Yeah. I repaired radios in the ships and off the ships. Replaced the when it was necessary on aircraft.
- Mr. Metzler:** So what kind of aircraft were you dealing with?
- Mr. Hafter:** Dealing, at that time, with the P-38 with the Seventeenth Photo Recon and then when I went over to the Seventieth Fighter Squadron, we worked on the P-39s.
- Mr. Metzler:** P-39 was a bit different than the P-38?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well the radio was the same. It was a little different to get into. You have to be very careful because the engine was in back of the pilot and the radio compartment was over that, so you had to be very careful. You got burned a few times by the hot exhaust.
- Mr. Metzler:** That must have been tough on the radio to be right up over the engine.
- Mr. Hafter:** It was, but it was well insulated though. Well insulated. It was a well-built ship.
- Mr. Metzler:** Would you remove the radio and repair them on the ground, or were you actually in the aircraft?
- Mr. Hafter:** No, we would remove the radio and replace it with another radio that we had repaired already.
- Mr. Metzler:** So you had an inventory of repaired equipment you could...was it common for the radio to go out on these aircraft?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well there was so much turbulence in the air and, also, when they were landing and taking off. They were all tube radios in those days.
- Mr. Metzler:** They didn't have transistors?
- Mr. Hafter:** No. Not in those days. (Laughs) Those old tubes would be shaken up quite a bit and go out. That was the main thing that we had to fool with was the tubes. Every once in a while we would replace sockets and things of that nature, but it was mostly tubes.
- Mr. Metzler:** Did you have an adequate supply of spare parts?
- Mr. Hafter:** Yes we did.
- Mr. Metzler:** So that was never a problem?
- Mr. Hafter:** No. That was never a problem. Never a problem.

- Mr. Metzler:** So were you busy, or did you, mostly, have, you know, just down time and then all of sudden a good bit of work and how did it go?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well the planes were flying constantly, all day long and the radio area, we weren't assigned to any certain plane. As a plane came in, we worked on it. Whereby the ground crews of the aircraft, the mechanics, they were assigned certain planes. But, we were never assigned certain planes. We just worked on anything that came in. So, therefore, we kept pretty busy because they were flying all day long.
- Mr. Metzler:** So where were they flying to, I mean.....
- Mr. Hafter:** Well, your P-39 was a ground support ship. It wasn't made to fight the Zero. It couldn'tit would be shot down too easy because the Zero could out maneuver it. So it was used for ground strafing mostly and ground support. They did a wonderful job on Guadalcanal by harassing the Japanese troops. Hey could fly low and they had 37 MM cannon in the nose. They could really blast things away with it.
- Mr. Metzler:** So the early part of your time on Guadalcanal, you were repairing radios on aircraft that were still hitting the Japanese held part of Guadalcanal?
- Mr. Hafter:** Correct.
- Mr. Metzler:** So then when Guadalcanal was finally totally secured, did the nature of your job change?
- Mr. Hafter:** No. It didn't change due to the fact that they would go out on missions of strafing barges and boats and things of that nature. They would fly up to the Shortland Islands and places of that nature and a little further on up. The still did that all their groundwork and anytime Japanese came in with supplies they would bomb and strafe them. We were kept busy. If you weren't busy over there, you would go crazy.
- Mr. Metzler:** Were you ever bothered with mosquitoes over there? I've heard horrible stories about the insects.
- Mr. Hafter:** Well I had malaria five times.
- Mr. Metzler:** What was that like?
- Mr. Hafter:** It's a fever that I don't wish on anybody. It's just cold chills. Even at one hundred twenty degrees you would just be freezing. Just shivering. They would wrap you up in few blankets but they had, they started serving us, what they called, atopine. (?) It was a, to take the place of quinine. You couldn't get

quinine in those days. So it helped. Made us all yellow. It was a little yellow pill and we were all yellow skinned. But it served its purpose. But everyone over there got malaria. Dysentery was prevalent. Living conditions were not the best in the world. We did have it better than the ground troops though. Had it much better. Those are the boys that caught it.

Mr. Metzler: When you were ill, what were you, in the infirmary, or just work your way through it, or just sleep your way through it, or what?

Mr. Hafter: I was in the infirmary one time and then it became too crowded in there so they, you just stayed in your own area and stayed in your bunk and sweated it out.

Mr.. Metzler: And, finally, your body would.....?

Mr. Hafter: Would thrust it off.

Mr. Metzler: Then you went.....

Mr. Hafter: Back to work.

Mr. Metzler: To replacing the radios. Now who did the actual radio repair work? Was that you?

Mr. Hafter: The actual radio repair work was done by the, I'm trying to think of the name of it. It was a group of men that was assigned to each squadron that would do the actual radio repair work for us. Funny thing. I can't think of the name of the company, the outfit that did it.

Mr. Metzler: So as the front, if you will, moved further north, and they were doing the island hopping in the area where these fighters needed to go, the P-39s, got further and further north.....

Mr. Hafter: Yes. Our first move off of Guadalcanal was about August of '43, we moved up to a little island called Ondonga. It was in New Georgia group. O-N-D-O-N-G-A. A small little island.

Mr. Metzler: That's one I have not heard of.

Mr. Hafter: It was very small island about one and a half miles wide by two miles long. We had a lagoon all around us, around seventy-five feet deep. Beautiful little place. I remember coming in on Ondonga, the CB's were making the airstrip for us. An air raid would come and they'd get under their heavy equipment and lay under it till the air raid stopped and then they'd go back to work again.

Mr. Metzler: They would lay under the bulldozer until then?

- Mr. Hafter:** Un huh.
- Mr. Metzler:** Did you observe some of these air raids?
- Mr. Hafter:** Quite a few.
- Mr. Metzler:** Tell what that was like.
- Mr. Hafter:** Scary. I guess everybody did a little praying. You never whether they were going to drop the bombs and we were under constant bombing every night.
- Mr. Metzler:** That was bombing and strafing by fire?
- Mr. Hafter:** No. We only encountered strafing two, or three times. It was bombing constantly.
- Mr. Metzler:** So just those old Betty's up there bombing away.
- Mr. Hafter:** We knew when they were coming in because their engines were not synchronized and they would sound like a washing machine. And you could tell when he was up there.....(makes humming sounds in up and down tones.) Pone night on Guadalcanal we were having a movie, we had made a little amphitheater in the curve of the hill there and set down coconut logs for seats and we had just gotten in a new bunch of replacements that day. All of a sudden we, during the movie, we heard that sound and we started inching our way out of the crowd and they started dropping their bombs and there was this one kid lost his cool, shall I say, and started running. I tackled him, I'll never forget, and I got on top of him and I said, "You damn fool. Stay down." I said, "Shrapnel will get you." When it was over, I got up and started shaking like a leaf and I said, "You idiots. You were on top of me." (?) (laughs)
- Mr. Metzler:** Sometimes you want to be on the bottom.
- Mr. Hafter:** You don't think of those things though. Its just reaction.
- Mr. Metzler:** Did he settle down after that?
- Mr. Hafter:** Oh yeah, he settled down.
- Mr. Metzler:** So he was a new arrival?
- Mr. Hafter:** Just arrived that day.
- Mr. Metzler:** So that was his inauguration?

- Mr. Hafter:** To be greeted that way. It was something. But they weren't accurate in their bombing. They just dropped them to be dropping them, just to keep us alert.
- Mr. Metzler:** And I guess this happened at night so we couldn't very well send up fighters to intercept them.
- Mr. Hafter:** We had no night fighters and the biggest guns we had on the island, at that time, were 90 mm and they couldn't reach the 25,000 feet they were dropping their bombs from. I will not forget one night a man, Major Kittle (?), who we just honored here. He asked the island commander if he could go up and roam the skies. He said, "You get that boy in the search lights and I'll shoot him down." When the time came the Jap came over and got him in the searchlights, right in the cross hairs.
- Mr. Metzler:** They had searchlights then?
- Mr. Hafter:** Yeah, they had searchlights. They got him in the crosshairs and Major Kittle (?) shoot one down. Another minute and a half later he shot a second one down. He got two within a minute and a half. That was the biggest cheering section on that whole island. Everybody jumped out of their foxholes and cheered. It was something to watch those planes come down.
- Mr. Metzler:** So after that, did we used that technique...?
- Mr. Hafter:** We used that technique for a while and then we got our P-61 night fighters came in.
- Mr. Metzler:** P-61?
- Mr. Hafter:** It was a twin boom. Something like the P-38 but it was a bigger ship. It was called a black widow.
- Mr. Metzler:** It was designed, specifically, for night fighting.
- Mr. Hafter:** For night fighting, yes.
- Mr. Metzler:** And that made a real difference, huh?
- Mr. Hafter:** Yeah. The Japs, we, kind of, knocked the sails out of them for a while. Then we started moving up the islands and their raids on Guadalcanal practically stopped.
- Mr. Metzler:** So how long were you on Ondonga?
- Mr. Hafter:** Ondonga, we were only on there about three months on Ondonga then we went to New Georgia, Munda (?) Strip, M-U-N-D-A, Munda. We stayed there for a while

then went to Sanspore, New Guinea. We were surrounded for about 150.000 Japs surrounding us.

Mr. Metzler: What was the name of the location again?

Mr. Hafter: Sansapore. S-A-N-S-P-O-R-E, Sanspore.

Mr.. Metzler: So going back to Ondonga for a moment now, what were the, if I can use the term, "living conditions" there, compared to New Caledonia?

Mr. Hafter: Guadalcanal?

Mr. Metzler: Was it better?

Mr. Hafter: Well we had a little better living conditions on Ondonga because we, it was coral island and the Japs hadn't fooled with Ondonga at all. We put up our tents and it was fairly decent living conditions there.

Mr. Metzler: What was the food like?

Mr. Hafter: When we got shipments in, it was all right. Other than that, it was K-rations and C-rations. We lived on that for quite a bit.

Mr. Metzler: You didn't always have shipments coming in?

Mr. Hafter: We sure didn't.

Mr. Metzler: And fresh water is usually a problem on those coral atolls?

Mr. Hafter: Yes, they used to have the water shipped in. Shipped in in big containers. We took a, we had our water barrels we used.

Mr. Metzler: Then you went on to Munda, New Georgia? What was that like?

Mr. Hafter: That was a beautiful strip. Long solid, white coral strip that didn't have to have that matting on it. It held all the planes. We had B-17s and B-24s on that strip, and P-38s. Big bombers. Meantime, on Ondonga we started switching over to P-38s. when we hit New Georgia, Munda airstrip, they gave us all P-38s and took the P-39s away from us. The pilots were very happy.

Mr. Metzler: Why were the pilots happy?

Mr. Hafter: They were happy because they didn't have to do strafing anymore, as an only duty. They could go up and fight now. And that's what they wanted to do.

- Mr. Metzler:** And so the B-17s and B-24s, they must have been, what, flying back over to the Philippines.....?
- Mr. Hafter:** They were flying in the Dutch East Indies. Up in that area, in Sumatra and places up in there in the Dutch East Indies. The '38s would escort them. Their job was to escort, not to fight. To keep the Japs away from them. They did a good job. Did a very fine job. We had very few aces in the Thirteenth Air Force. Our job was, most of the time, just escorting. The Fifth Air Force got the plums.
- Mr. Metzler:** Yeah, you mentioned earlier, when you and I were talking, that the Thirteenth was the forgotten Air Force. Tell me a little more about that.
- Mr. Hafter:** Well we were under Navy command for about a year. The Navy took the credit. Our boys bore the brunt of just, what the Navy wanted to give them. If there were any good fights, the Navy got into it and the Marines got into it. We just escorted.
- Mr. Metzler:** What did that make you guys feel like?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well, we had a job to do. We really didn't think of it in those days. We all were there together. But it's later on when we realize that...how bad we were treated.
- Mr. Metzler:** Got a chance to think about it a little bit?
- Mr. Hafter:** We had a very wonderful bunch of fellows. It was a pleasure to work with them.
- Mr. Metzler:** How many were in your immediate unit that you worked daily with. How many people?
- Mr. Hafter:** In the communications section there were twenty of us. That included the fellows that did nothing but string wires. There were operators on the switchboards, then the others worked on the planes. The complement of the squadrons was, I think, about three hundred men altogether. We had a carpenter with us and he was a real drunkard. Drank anything he could get hold of.
- Mr. Metzler:** Must have been hard to get a hold of?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well he drank the torpedo juice, in fact.
- Mr. Metzler:** What was torpedo juice made out of?
- Mr. Hafter:** It's an alcohol, highly concentrated. When we got....when he came to us on Guadalcanal, those islands there are blessed with fantastic wood. Mahogany and teak wood and ebony and he built a sixteen-hole outhouse for us of mahogany, solid mahogany. Hand rubbed. And he wouldn't let anybody use it till he completely finished it. He had it fixed where it could be torn down and moved to the next island.

- Mr. Metzler:** So it was portable?
- Mr. Hafter:** It was portable. That was the multi-million dollar outhouse.
- Mr. Metzler:** It would cost a lot to replace that today.
- Mr. Hafter:** Beautiful mahogany wood. He was an excellent carpenter. He was sent back to the States though. I think he died in the hospital. Just too much stuff. He drank anything he could get a hold of. It's very sad.
- Mr. Metzler:** So you got to know these guys pretty well then, that were in your squadron?
- Mr. Hafter:** Oh Yeah. We knew each other's habits and each other's, we knew each other's girlfriends. We'd get letters and share them all.
- Mr. Metzler:** And were you closely associated with the pilots, as well, or were they separate?
- Mr. Hafter:** They were, they had the officer's area. In the communications sections, I think I said a while ago, that we weren't assigned to any particular plane, so we didn't get to know the pilots like a mechanic did. Mechanics knew their pilots real well.
- Mr. Metzler:** They were part of that.
- Mr. Hafter:** They were part of them, yeah. We, as a whole, worked on any plane that came in. So we really didn't get to know the pilots very well.
- Mr. Metzler:** So after New Georgia, was that?
- Mr. Hafter:** We went to Sanspore, New Guinea.
- Mr. Metzler:** OK, and what was it like there?
- Mr. Hafter:** It was, well, we had paradise for a while. There was a beautiful stream running, a mountain stream, running near us. Pure water. It was just gorgeous. We swam in it, bathe in it, washed our clothes. All of a sudden, one day, the medics put it off limit. The Japanese found out we were using it and they used it as a latrine. So the medics put it off limits. We couldn't fool with it anymore.
- Mr. Metzler:** So the Japanese were up in the mountains?
- Mr. Hafter:** In the mountains, yes.
- Mr. Metzler:** So the New Guinea area had not been totally secured yet then?
- Mr. Hafter:** No, not yet.

- Mr. Metzler:** So it sounds like it's good you stayed out of that water.
- Mr. Hafter:** The medics made us. It would have been disastrous. Sanspore was, actually, was stationary for Dutch East Indies we went up to Morotai (?), that's in the Dutch East Indies, a little later on. That's closer to the Japanese. We got some of our most severe bombing on Morotai. I think that was one of the most heavily bombed places.
- Mr. Metzler:** How do you spell that again?
- Mr. Hafter:** M-O-R-O-T-A-I.
- Mr. Metzler:** That's still in New Guinea?
- Mr. Hafter:** No, that's the Dutch East Indies.
- Mr. Metzler:** Boy, you got around over there.
- Mr. Hafter:** Yeah, we did.
- Mr. Metzler:** So how long were you at Sanspore?
- Mr. Hafter:** I don't really recall. I think we stayed at Sanspore about four months. Then on into the Dutch East Indies. That was strictly a staging area also to get up into, further up there. From Morotai to the Dutch East Indies, the planes could fly over into Indo China very easy. It was long trips, but they could fly there.
- Mr. Metzler:** About what time now, are we getting into? Is this "44 still?
- Mr. Hafter:** This was in "44. In Morotai and the Dutch East Indies, that was 1944. I'm trying to think when we, because we went into the Philippine Islands, I think, in February of "45.
- Mr. Metzler:** Tell me about the Philippines.
- Mr. Hafter:** We landed at a little place called Lingayan Gulf, which was north of Manila. Our squadron was on the baseball field. That's where we had our base there. The strip wasn't too far way from us. The people were wonderful and we enjoyed being around humans for a change. Had little girls come in there that took our laundry and cleaned our laundry for us for a peso, or two pesos. It was really nice.
- Mr.. Metzler:** It was almost like being to civilization then after all the island hopping.
- Mr. Hafter:** Yes, there was no civilization in the islands, what so ever.
- Mr. Metzler:** So this was a more permanent location then?

- Mr. Hafter:** No, from Lingayan, that was our staging area in the Philippines, we moved on down further toward Manila. And, finally, went on into Mindoro as that was taken.
- Mr. Metzler:** You were on the road, weren't you? This whole war?
- Mr. Hafter:** It gave me a good outlook. It helped a lot of us in many ways. It gave us a broad outlook, because most of us that went into the service never got out of our own towns in those days. You didn't....I never was out of the city of Dallas.
- Mr. Metzler:** World travel wasn't the norm back then.
- Mr. Hafter:** No.
- Mr. Metzler:** So each place was a little different then?
- Mr. Hafter:** Yes, it was.
- Mr. Metzler:** So what was it that you remember the most about Mindoro?
- Mr. Hafter:** Ah....the people, Philippine people. Very, very friendly. Helped us in any way they could. We had dances there. Swatarn (?) dances.
- Mr. Metzler:** Tell me about what a typical dance would be like. What would happen?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well the girls were escorted to the dance by their mothers. They were all escorted, all the time. They all had dresses made of parachute silk. It was something to see. Very, very nice people. Very lovely people. It's just sad to hear some of the tales that they told about the Japanese. It's makes you feel very sad.
- Mr. Metzler:** What kind of stories?
- Mr. Hafter:** Horror, cruelty. Like what's going on in Iraq right now, the beheadings. Japanese did the same thing to civilians there, the Filipinos, if they didn't cooperate. If they thought they were pigs, or anything, they would do the same thing to them. They were brave people.
- Mr. Metzler:** I guess in many ways they saw the Americans as their savior that came and freed them from a.....
- Mr. Hafter:** Yes. We could do no wrong at that time. They held out their arms to us. The food they didn't have, I mean, they couldn't afford to do, but they brought it to us anyway. It was real nice, very nice people.

We went down to Mindanao, that's where the, another spot there over at Palawan, that's where I came home from, was Palawan.

Mr. Metzler: So from Mindoro down to Mindanao. And what was the name of the location on Mindanao?

Mr. Hafter: It's just, that's the town, the province there, Mindanao.

Mr. Metzler: That's on a southern island, I think.

Mr. Hafter: Right. Then we went over to Palawan and then came home from there, thank goodness.

Mr. Metzler: Let's go back to that dance for a minute. Tell me what kind of dances; what was the music?

Mr. Hafter: The music was the music of those days. Tommy Dorsey, Harry James. We had records.

Mr. Metzler: So you had a sound system?

Mr. Hafter: Oh yes. You know, you do a lot of things over there. We had our own little theater. We built our own little theater there. For showing movies.

Mr. Metzler: No live theater?

Mr. Hafter: No.....the only USO tour we ever saw was Kay Kaiser came over with his group. And those girls were well guarded. Well guarded.

Mr. Metzler: Now what kind of show was that then?

Mr. Hafter: They just put on a good stage show. Music, music, music. Of course we all enjoyed that music in those days.

Mr. Metzler: A little torpedo juice and then enjoyed the music, or what?

Mr. Hafter: No. I stopped drinking that stuff. (laughs) That'll kill ya.

Mr. Metzler: Well, if you stopped that means you started. What was that like?

Mr. Hafter: I got in with the medics and they had that 180 proof alcohol. You put a little in your canteen, your tin cup and then put a little grapefruit juice with it and you couldn't hold the cup because it burned you. That's how hot that stuff was. It got hot fast. You can imagine what it did to your system. You could dilute it down pretty good. I really got drunk one time on it and that was it. Once was enough.

- Mr. Metzler:** Was there alcohol generally available, either.....
- Mr. Hafter:** No. The only alcohol that came in there was when the pilots went to New Zealand, or Australia, on their rest leave and they would bring it back. Then they would sell it. They scotch and bourbon were going for one hundred dollars a fifth. The gin was going for fifty dollars a fifth. So you can see why I didn't drink.
- Mr. Metzler:** So the pilots got R&R trips?
- Mr. Hafter:** Oh Yeah, they did. My first relief was twenty-one months in the islands. They sent me down to a little town called, McKay, (?) Australia, for rest leave, for ten days. When they said a rest leave, they really mean it. Because there was nothing there to do. You could eat and sleep.
- Mr. Metzler:** McKay. M-C-K-A-Y?
- Mr. Hafter:** I think that is the way you spell it. Uh-huh. McKay, Australia.
- Mr. Metzler:** And you were down there for ten days?
- Mr. Hafter:** Ten days on the rest leave.
- Mr. Metzler:** And so you just slept?
- Mr. Hafter:** And I pulled KP down there as a Master Sergeant. Because everybody in the interment camp, not internment camp, but the camp where we all went to, everyone pulled KP. If your name was drawn, you pulled it.
- Mr. Metzler:** Did you get a chance to mix, at all, with the Australians?
- Mr. Hafter:** There were very few. All the men were gone to the service already and the gals that were left there, every town had their permanent party personnel in the service and the permanent party had the girls. As we came as transients, we looked around and we admired them and that was it. There was a lot of fruit and a lot of vegetables there and that is what we ate. The food was good. The food was very good.
- Mr. Metzler:** So what would go on, a transport ship?
- Mr. Hafter:** We flew. Flew from Morotai down there on a C-47. We flew down there and they flew us back after our ten days was up. It was ten days of heaven.
- Mr. Metzler:** I bet it was tough to go back, huh?

- Mr. Hafter:** Had to. It was nice. We had good, fresh food. I gained ten pounds in ten days.
- Mr. Metzler:** Did you loose a lot of weight when you were.....
- Mr. Hafter:** I came back from the service weighing one hundred thirty-five pounds. I weighed about one hundred forty-five going in.
- Mr. Metzler:** Of course, the malaria didn't help.
- Mr. Hafter:** No. It didn't. It's your living conditions, it's.....
- Mr. Metzler:** SO you were, your last station was in Mindanao then?
- Mr. Hafter:** Yeah. Last station. I was only on Palawan for about a week or two. That was the last place.
- Mr. Metzler:** So is that where you were when the war ended?
- Mr. Hafter:** On Mindanao when the war ended.
- Mr. Metzler:** Did you get much news about what was going on in the war?
- Mr. Hafter:** Oh yeah, we had our short-wave radios and everything. But, and we had a little daily newspaper we put out. We were completely loaded and ready to go n the invasion of Japan when war was over and we breathed a sign of relief.
- Mr. Metzler:** Of course, everybody was expecting an invasion of Japan and did you guys know what your roll was going to be and where you were going.....?
- Mr. Hafter:** No. We didn't. That was all secret stuff. We knew we were going. We didn't know where. We knew it would be hell. We didn't realize, I don't think anyone realized how well fortified that place was.
- Mr. Metzler:** Well, I mean, when you look at how fortified Okinawa and Iwo Jima was, well multiply that by a thousand and that's what the Japanese islands would have been.
- Mr. Hafter:** Not only that. Every little kid had, would have fought. They found hidden places in Japan where we didn't know about after the war. It would have been a massacre, a massacre. So we can thank our lucky stars that President Truman sanctioned the bombs.
- Mr. Metzler:** So you found out about the bombs from listening to the short wave radio?
- Mr. Hafter:** Yes.
- Mr. Metzler:** What were you picking up, what stations, what broadcast?

Mr. Hafter: Short wave from the States.

Mr. Metzler: So what the [people in the States, you guys knew?

Mr. Hafter: Yeah. We got it almost instantly. I mean the time difference, but we had a ham radio operator, who handled ham before the war and he built sets over there.

Mr. Metzler: Well, I guess, since you guys repaired and installed radios, you'd have a pretty good connection with the outside world and, by golly, you did.

Mr. Hafter: We did.

Mr. Metzler: When you heard about, the group heard about the surrender of the Japanese, what was that like?

Mr. Hafter: I guess it was pure bedlam. It's hard to describe, I mean the feeling, the happiness.....(Side A ends).

SIDE B:

Mr. Metzler: During your overseas service, did you stay in close contact with family in the States?

Mr. Hafter: Oh yeah. We had our mail. Of course, today they have telephones. We had our e-mail, I guess our v-mail.....(tape goes blank)

Mr. Metzler: Ok. Go ahead, Joe.

Mr. Hafter: My mother said that my letters came in sometime like lace. Been censored. I don't know what you wrote, but she says, "I didn't read anything. It said, "Dear Mother," and that's about it. Your son, Joe."

Mr. Metzler: The and of made it through and that' about it.

Mr. Hafter: That's about it. (laughs) it's a funny thing, because those, the letters we sent didn't get home for, at least, a month and the news was old by then. But we couldn't talk about it. Couldn't talk about it.

Mr. Metzler: Well the most important thing about it was to know that you were OK and able to write a letter.

Mr. Hafter: And the packages, we'd get packages, cakes and stuff that were all smashed up and a month old, but we ate them anyway. When a package came form home, everybody divided. We were one group and we just had fun.

- Mr. Metzler:** Who was your commanding officer during this, or did you just.....
- Mr. Hafter:** Oh, a lot of different ones. The two that stand out, one was Major Kittle, (?) Louis Kittle (?). One was, he was a colonel when he came in, Adams, his name was, Milton Adams. He was a West Pointer. He was a good man to. He was a little stricter than Kittle, but he was a very fair man. When Adams came in, he came on Mandago (?), took over from Kittle. When Adams came in he called a squadron meeting and, one thing I'll never forget, he says, "Gentleman, we're here to fight a war and we're going to work. That's what it is all about. I know that there's a lot of Army rules and regulations that get adhered to, but there is one that is going to be thrown away." He says, "My office is open to any man with a legitimate gripe. You don't have to go through the First Sergeant. , But it must be legitimate. You do not have to go through the First Sergeant to see me." Well right there, he endeared himself to al the men. He said, "All I require is work." That's what he got from us. To my knowledge, he flew the longest mission ever to be flown by a P-38 pilot. He was in the air twelve hours.
- Mr. Metzler:** I didn't know a P-38 carried that much fuel.
- Mr.. Hafter:** Well. with the big belly tanks, they could. He escorted some bombers over Indo-China. To me, that's the longest mission that has ever been flown.
- Mr. Metzler:** So a lot of respect for your Commander?
- Mr. Hafter:** Oh yes. There was only one, or two, squadron commanders that we had that we didn't care for. They were big shots and they didn't 't get the work out of us they could have gotten out. The two main ones. Lou Kittle and Adams, they knew how to handle men. And they treated us fair.
- Mr. Metzler:** Were any of these guys these ninety-day wonders you hear so much about, or were they all West Pointers, or....?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well, Kittle, nor Adams, neither one was a ninety-day wonder. One was a West Pointer and one went to flight school and everything else. He went through college. He wasn't a ninety-day wonder. Kittle wasn't a ninety-day wonder. We didn't have too many ninety-day wonders over there. Pilots came over fast. One of them came in and said, "My God. I've got four hours in the air, that's all I've ever flown."
- Mr. Metzler:** Four hours?
- Mr. Hafter:** Uh-huh.
- Mr. Metzler:** That was it?

Mr. Hafter: Yes. They sent him over there. He survived, thank goodness. They needed pilots so badly. They needed replacements so badly. They took what they could get and we took what we could get. It's an experience I wouldn't want to go through again, but I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. I've heard a lot of veterans say that. So you were close to your buddy, who, I've heard stories, well, we were like family, we were closer than brothers, band of brothers, etc. Is that how it was with you?

Mr., Hafter: Yes. When one man had troubles, we all had troubles. One man would get a Dear John letter from home and we'd cry with him. It was.... you worked together because you all had a job to do and you couldn't separate yourself, because if you could, you couldn't get the job done.

Mr. Metzler: Were you able to stay in contact with a lot of these guys after the war?

Mr. Hafter: Yes. In fact, I, my wife and myself did the hosting for Seventieth Fighter Squadron. Every year we have a reunion. We have been doing this since 1980. Somebody started it and we took over a little later on. We've enjoyed it very much because I get to talk to the men on the [phone a lot. I try to keep them boosted up so they will come to the meetings. It's very important to keep them together. Our average age in the Seventieth Fighter Squadron, now, is around eighty-three, eighty-two, and eighty-three. We are having another meeting in Shreveport, twenty-first, twenty-second, twenty-third and twenty-fourth of September. Twenty-five men have said they are coming. They can bring their wives, or their girlfriends and we are having men now that have never been to a meeting before. I don't know what it is. I think maybe my talking to them, or they are realizing they should see some of the old buddies before they pass on. But it is a pleasure to talk to them. It's, you get to know them and get to know their family just by the phone. When you do meet them, it's a real pleasure.

Mr. Metzler: When you think back on that period on the Pacific, what comes to mind as the most humorous incident that you can think of? Just off the top of your head. Something that is on the lighter side. I've heard about the mahogany latrine. But you can't use that one. I've already got that.

Mr. Hafter: Well. I'm trying to think. There was two, or three, things. One is we would get in the foxhole at night when the bombs are dropping and I'm swatting mosquitoes. The guy says, "Listen for the bombs." I said, "I don't give damn about the bombs, these mesquites hurt me worse than the bomb does. If a bomb hits, I'm not going to feel it." I fought mosquitoes. I remember that as, they used to get so mad at me. Humorous things.....trying to think. There was a number of them. We didn't have turkey for Thanksgiving because some of the fellows got drunk and stolid it.

Mr. Metzler: What did they do with it?

- Mr. Hafter:** They ate it. They ate the turkey. They got drunk and they split it up.
- Mr. Metzler:** Torpedo juice again, huh>
- Mr. Hafter:** We didn't have turkey that Thanksgiving.
- Mr. Metzler:** You had all the rest of the trimmings and just no turkey?
- Mr. Hafter:** No turkey.
- Mr. Metzler:** Did they bring in, what, canned turkey?
- Mr. Hafter:** No they brought in frozen turkeys. That was toward the end. That was in '44. They flew some turkeys into us. I don't know where they came from, but they flew them in and we had frozen, we thawed them out and cooked them. We had some good cooks. Had some wonderful cooks.
- Mr. Metzler:** Who cooked and what kind of cooking did they do?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well.....Our Sergeant-in-charge of the mess hall, he was an amateur cook before the war, he said. He used to try to vary things to make it appealing. He did. He did a good ob. He was in with the medics. They would go out to ships and he'd they would take a G.I. Hawky (?) out to the ships and trade it for fresh meat, for fresh fruit and bring it on back. Our Squadron ate pretty good. Ate pretty good.
- Mr. Metzler:** What about on the more serious side. What are the, what comes to you mind as one of the most somber, or serious, or troubling experiences that you had When y were over there?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well it's, I guess, the constant bombing that we got at night. Then you hear a scream and where a bomb had hit. And then silence. That's about the worse there was. Thank goodness I got to Guadalcanal after all the shelling stopped. But, we took the bombings.
- Mr. Metzler:** What is your feeling towards the Japanese. Them having been an adversary and hearing all the stories about brutality and what have you? Looking back on that, some sixty years later.
- Mr. Hafter:** They were trained a little different than we were. But they had a job to do just like we had a job to do. I harbor no ill feelings with them now. They were sent into the situating the same way we were. They had orders, don't take prisoners. Well, we had the same orders in some areas. You just didn't have room for prisoners. They, thank goodness, they didn't accomplish what they set out to do. They could have if they had invaded when, instead of just bombing, they had

invaded Hawaii, we'd have been in trouble. We would have been in deep trouble. We can thank our good stars there.

Mr. Metzler: Well, certainly, one of the important events was the one that was remembered this morning at the services here. That was the downing of Yamamoto. Where were you when all of that was going on?

Mr. Hafter: I was on, I was with the squadron. It was a group effort. The 347 Fighter Group. was comprised of a number of fighter squadrons and they took men out of each squadron. Lou Kittle was with the Seventieth Fighter at that time and Rom Lampher (?) was with the Seventieth Fighter at that time. It was a group effort. It wasn't just one squadron. Actually, we didn't know too much about it when it happened. A few fellows were in on it because they had to put those bigger belly tanks on. Bigger gas tanks on. They didn't really know it was going to happen until after it really happened. I really don't remember too much of that day of the occurrence after they came back. We were so busy servicing the ships.

Mr. Metzler: You were just doing your job?

Mr. Hafter: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: So the war was over and there was the chance to go back to the States. Did you go back immediately, or.....?

Mr. Hafter: I got back to the States around November, right before Thanksgiving. Right before Thanksgiving of 1945. I got out the day after Thanksgiving, which is a happy day to get out. It was a sad day in many respects. I was going to stay in, as a master sergeant, but we were treated very poorly, very badly from the time we hit the troop train coming from the State of Washington to Fort Sam Houston. I got fed up with it. We had no supervision what so ever. We had no dining car on the troop train. No mess car there. When the train stopped, we ran off and got sandwiches and ran back on. We were treated very poorly. So that put a sour note to everything, so I just got out. Then I went on back home real fast.

Mr. Metzler: So you came home from the East Indies, what, on a troop ship of some sort?

Mr. Hafter: I came back from Philippines on a troop ship. I don't remember too much of it. It wasn't very nice on that ship coming home. I guess that's what started to sour me, I guess.

Mr. Metzler: You left the service, then, at Fort Sam?

Mr. Hafter: At Fort Sam. I got out, I think, November 28. That's when I got out and headed back to Dallas. Got back to Dallas and got married a month later and got on with my life. Got a job and got going again.

- Mr. Metzler:** When you got back to the States, did it seem like it had changed since you had left, or was it just, kind of, back to good old normal.....?
- Mr. Hafter:** I guess I just started where I left off. It didn't change any to me. I guess it changed some, I mean it's the individual. I had a bog, nice family to come home to. There was eight of us. Six sisters and one brother and I had a nice family to come back to, mother and father. I just blended right on in. Got rid of all my stuff. Didn't keep a thing.
- Mr. Metzler:** How come?
- Mr. Hafter:** I don't know. I guess I was through with it and I just had no desire to keep it. Now, I regret it. It's worth so much money today. It's mementos.
- Mr. Metzler:** It's sentimental value as well as.....
- Mr. Hafter:** I do have some tings I got in the Phillipine Islands. A ring that a Filipino made me with my name on it, I have one with my first wife's name on it. Little tings of that nature. He made me a P-38 plane out of some medals. I've got that at home to. But as far as anything from the Army, the Air Force, I have nothing left. I have been trying to get a few things lately, a little boy, who came to our meeting accidentally in St Louis a couple of years ago, eleven year old kid and he was so interested in World War Two and I'm getting a few things for him. I've sent him some invasion money that we had, that I had in my pocket. I gave it to him. Some mold (?) that I sent it to him.
- Mr. Metzler:** So, what kind of medals are these?
- M. Hafter:** We had the, my battle ribbon with eight stars on it, eight battles. And a good conduct medal. Everybody got a good conduct medal. (laughs). Unless you really messed up. We got a citation for. A Presidential citation for our outfit to. I had (unintelligible) medals to. I gave them to David. We keep in touch with him all the time. Nice kid.
- Mr. Metzler:** What else would you like to talk about, or stories that you would like to share with us while we've got the time here?
- Mr. Hafter:** Well, it's meet people.....your thoughts stay with them all the time. I mean, you meet characters. Meet wonderful people and there are a lot of fellows that have passed on that I still remember. Remember the old days. They keep you going on those memories to. Something that you can't buy. And there are some wonderful, wonderful memories. But that's, I guess, that's about it.
- Mr. Metzler:** Well I appreciate your taking the time today to share your experiences with us.
- Mr. Hafter:** I hope I can do some good with this.

Mr.. Metzler: Every story adds to the collection and it all fits together. I appreciate your sharing it with us.

Mr. Hafter: Thank you for asking me to do it and anytime we can do anything else for you just holler.

Mr. Metzler: I appreciate that. Thank you again.

Mr.. Hafter: Thank you. Do appreciate it. (TAPE ENDS).

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