

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Doug Aitken

USS *Hadley*, Pacific War

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Mr. Metzler: This is Ed Metzler and today is September 16, 2005. I am interviewing Mr. Doug Aitken, Captain U.S. Navy, retired. 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 historical information related to this site.

Let me start out, Doug, by thanking you for spending the time to share your experiences with us and to add to the Museum archives. Let's start by talking about where your home town is, when and where you were born, a little bit about your family.

Capt. Aitken: Thanks, Ed. I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on June 18, 1922. My parents lived for a long, long time. They had a wonderful life until they were in their nineties. We had a fine family together. We moved to Dayton, Ohio, during the Depression. My father is from California, a native Californian and my mother is a native Pennsylvanian. She was born in Oil City, Pennsylvania, the northwest corner and moved to California in her early high school days. She met my father at Berkeley High School in California. They both went on to the University of California at Berkeley and graduated from there. My father was in the automobile business. In the Depression years, he was one of the unfortunate people who lost everything—his house, his business, his job, and all. He lost everything except his determination to support his family. He worked very hard and paid everything off. I admire him so greatly.

We moved to Dayton, Ohio, for a couple of years and then on to California in the middle of my sophomore year in high school. I graduated from Palo Alto High School in 1940. We all knew that something was going to happen because of the turmoil in Europe and the advances of the Nazis and the apparent trouble with the Japanese. I remember Pearl Harbor. I was in my living room at home in Palo Alto on that Sunday morning and heard the announcements over the radio. I really couldn't believe it. My parents also knew more than I did that I was going to be involved in the war, but I guess I suspected it.

The draft was in operation. I was not affected immediately. My number didn't come up. General Hershey hadn't pulled up my number yet out of the fish bowl. But along about mid-summer my number came up.

Mr. Metzler: How old were you then when Pearl Harbor happened?

Capt. Aitken: When Pearl Harbor happened I was nineteen. My number came up and I was in the middle of college. Pearl Harbor took place near the middle of my sophomore year. I was called in for a physical examination. You know what a physical examination for the draft consists of. Drop your pants; check forward and aft; check and see if I'm breathing; be able to walk across the room and back. Son, you're ready to go.

Mr. Metzler: You're fit.

Capt. Aitken: My examination took probably thirty seconds. I got my notification in the mail and decided, hey, I got to do something about this. The guys at the fraternity house in San Jose, I was house manager of the house actually, were going into the various armed services. Of course, after Pearl Harbor many of them went right into the Marine Corps or the Army or the Air Corps or the Navy. Our football team at that point, I remember clearly, was over in Hawaii to play the University of Hawaii their annual December football game. At the time of Pearl Harbor they were there. Most of them did not come back because they enlisted on the spot and went right on into the service at that point.

I found that my 1-A draft card came in the mail and after talking to everybody, a bunch of us decided we'd go in the Navy instead of the Army. I was a renegade because the rest of my family was Army. That didn't meet with too much satisfaction to them perhaps, but that was my choice.

Mr. Metzler: Was your dad in the Army?

Capt.. Aitken: Yes, World War I. I signed up for the Navy in the officer candidate program which permitted me to stay in college for the following year and probably would be taken out and sent to school somehow. Come June 1943, I was put into uniform and sent to UCLA in Los Angeles for the summer semester. We marched and we did calisthenics and we did cross-country runs and all this sort of thing and took a lot of courses. I had been a math major but I decided I wanted to get my degree as fast as possible. So, I changed my major to accounting and was able to complete my major in Los Angeles. Then they took us out of Los Angeles at UCLA and sent us to Norfolk awaiting a class at a midshipmen's school.

I went to Columbia University in New York City and had what the equivalent would be of a semester up there, but mostly Navy subjects. At the same time, on April 13, 1944, I was commissioned an ensign in the United States Naval Reserve and known as what is now known as a “ninety-day wonder.”

Mr. Metzler: You’re one of the famous “ninety-day wonders.”

Capt. Aitken: Actually, it was more than ninety days. It was probably between four and five months. But nevertheless, I was a ninety-day wonder and I didn’t know from what. I got my college degree at the same time. It was mailed to me. Which I was very pleased to get.

A little anecdote: My first duty was at the Brooklyn Naval Shipyard to go to radar school so I could work on the radars on a destroyer. I reported in and the gentleman who received us in there one at a time, was the chief warrant officer. Chief warrant officer were the old salts of the Navy. They had been around for years and years and years. They had come up through the ranks and they’re now commissioned as a warrant officer.

Mr. Metzler: From the old Navy.

Capt. Aitken: From the real old Navy. I walked up to him and, of course, being an ensign, that is a hair senior to a warrant officer. So, he stood up and greeted me and I thought, “How do you do.” I said, “Where’s the BOQ, the bachelor officers’ quarters? I’ll need to have a place to stay over here.” “Well, sir,” he said, “the bachelor officers’ quarters is full and you’ll have to go out and find a place on the beach somewhere.” The Navy term, I didn’t know, “on the beach” means out in town. This being April 1944, I suddenly dropped my jaw in thinking, “My lord, I’m going to have to go out on the beach. Where am I going to get a tent?” (laughs) I didn’t say anything but he saw the concern on my face and he saved the day by saying, “Well, you know, an apartment out in town somewhere.” I said, “Oh yes, yes, of course.” I went to radar school.

Mr. Metzler: So you found a place.

Capt. Aitken: Oh, yes.

Mr. Metzler: I would think housing must have been very short everywhere.

Capt. Aitken: Housing was short. Another fellow in the same class that I was in and went through the same school as I from Columbia found a place at the Catholic Men’s Club up on a hill in Brooklyn. Knights of Columbus I think is the

term. Anyway, we enjoyed a room together there.

I completed radar school and went to Norfolk for some more destroyer school and teamed up there with what would then be called our CIC crew. This was the Combat Information Center crew of about a dozen of us, I think it was. We trained together there. We went to St. Simons Island, Georgia, to control aircraft. We went to Brigantine Island, New Jersey, to control aircraft under different circumstances. We did a lot of maneuvering board problems. We learned a lot at those schools for a few weeks. Then we went out to California to Treasure Island. Went aboard the *Bradford* DD-545 for a few weeks up and down the coast. I guess the purpose of that was stated as “training.” I think it was more aptly known as “get rid of your seasickness, guys.” The waters off of the California coast are notoriously rough. I was sick as a dog wondering why in the world did I ever join the Navy.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, to be in the Army.

Capt. Aitken: I sat there on a stool in Combat Information Center on the mid-watch, which is midnight to 4 a.m. I had a bucket right down beneath my knees. It was ghastly. But that did it because thereafter, seasickness didn't bother me. I got it out of my system, thankfully.

Mr. Metzler: Some people never get over it.

Capt. Aitken: Some people don't. I guess it would bother me a little bit today, but then on *Hadley*, which was my permanent destroyer, I didn't have any problems whatsoever even during typhoons and storms when there's no eating available. All you can have is a piece of toast or something like that.

Mr. Metzler: Typhoons in a destroyer—that's about as rough as it gets.

Capt. Aitken: It gets pretty rough. We went through one I'll tell you about in a little while.

We went down to San Pedro where the ship was built and were there onboard for its commissioning on November 25, 1944. The widow of Commander Hadley for whom the ship is named, he was killed in the Solomons in '42, his widow christened the ship when she was launched. I have pictures here to show you of that launching and her breaking the bottle of champagne on the bow.

Mr. Metzler: She was the DD—

Capt. Aitken: 774. DD-774, USS *Hugh William Hadley*. Mrs. Hadley was there also at the

commissioning, of course. We were all on deck. Commander Chamberlain was our commissioning and shake-down cruise skipper. We did all of that.

Mr. Metzler: What position were you in in the crew at this point?

Capt. Aitken: I was in CIC. I was technically called the radar and intercept officer. The CIC officer was a slightly-senior-to-me ensign. If that means anything in rank. It doesn't mean much but he was the boss. We did a lot of training and working with aircraft and shore bombardment and that sort of thing off the California coast. We were pronounced ready for combat and departed for Pearl Harbor escorting an aircraft carrier to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Metzler: Which one?

Capt. Aitken: I can't remember.

Mr. Metzler: It was big.

Capt. Aitken: I've got that written down. The HMS *Rene* was one that we escorted. It was either to Pearl Harbor or from Pearl Harbor to Ulithi.

Mr. Metzler: A Royal Navy craft.

Capt. Aitken: Yes. Previously it was a US "jeep" as we called them. A "jeep carrier" was a small carrier. The Brits had it at that time.

Mr. Metzler: A light carrier.

Capt. Aitken: A light carrier, yes. After our shake-down cruise was over, we got a new skipper. The new skipper was Commander Baron Joseph Mullaney. He was to be our battle skipper.

Mr. Metzler: Mullaney?

Capt. Aitken: Mullaney, M-u-l-l-a-n-e-y. He was a seasoned, battle-hardened destroyer skipper. He had had a lot of experience. I'm very thankful for him because I sit before you today totally unscathed. I owe my life to him and some other factors which we'll talk about later. He was a great guy and the crew adored him.

I might give you a little anecdote on him: At the time he took over from Commander Chamberlain in San Diego, he gave a little talk that he wasn't much for giving speeches. But he gave a talk to the crew.

Mr. Metzler: Was he an older guy?

Capt. Aitken: He was older. He was about old enough to be my father approximately, I guess.

Mr. Metzler: So he was in his forties probably.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, he was in his forties. To indicate his age, he made captain when he left our ship about six months later and went to command a destroyer squadron which is a fairly senior position at that point. In his speech when he took over command of the ship in San Diego, he said among other things, "And to you men," and he turned and faced the crew, "I'm going to have to learn how to get along with you." He turned to the officers and said, "You gentlemen are going to have to learn how to get along with me." If you think about that a minute, that's pretty interesting advice.

Mr. Metzler: Yes, interesting view.

Capt. Aitken: Interesting view. And he did and we did. We got along fine. Being a youngster, I was scared of him, frankly. (laughs) But he was so knowledgeable and so good.

We went on to Pearl Harbor. Had a few days there for some underway inspections that they give all ships when they head out in foreign waters.

Mr. Metzler: At this point, you don't have any idea where your ultimate destination is going to be or anything.

Capt. Aitken: At that moment, no, but as soon as we left Pearl Harbor we got the news and the invasion plans for Okinawa. We didn't know it. Maybe the skipper had it, but he didn't disclose it to us until we left Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Metzler: Didn't want to leak it accidentally.

Capt. Aitken: That's right. It was April 1st, Easter Sunday in 1945. So we went on to Ulithi non-stop. We had to re-fuel a couple of times from the carrier which is normal under those conditions. We sat at Ulithi for a while and I have never in my life seen so many Navy ships. The aircraft carriers were lined up it seems as far as I could see. Other kinds of ships. It was an assembly point.

Mr. Metzler: This was after Iwo Jima.

Capt. Aitken: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Right after it.

Capt. Aitken: Just right after it. I'm sure they were just cleaning up. But yes, just after Iwo Jima.

Mr. Metzler: Ulithi must have been a really big port facility then.

Capt. Aitken: It was a huge anchorage protected by islands and coral reefs. We loaded up to the gills on fuel and ammo and stores of all kinds. We left in stages and headed for Okinawa. We were escorting LSTs and LCIs and troop transports of all kinds and cargo ships. Just a whole fleet of ships going to Okinawa. We were among many other destroyers. This group of ships, reportedly, was the largest invasion armada ever assembled in history.

Mr. Metzler: A squadron of destroyers though.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, many squadrons of destroyers. It was a whole wad of destroyers out there. They had all this plan laid out for these kamikaze attacks.

Mr. Metzler: Kamikaze was a known threat at that time having been experienced for several major battles.

Capt. Aitken: Principally, the Philippines. That's when they really came into being. There were a couple of minor incidents before that, but I think the Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Metzler: Then Iwo, of course.

Capt. Aitken: Then Iwo. That was when the kamikazes came into being. That was their last-ditch stand, so they thought.

We steamed on to Okinawa and patrolled the landing areas for any submarines, continually watching for enemy aircraft and various minor assignments there for probably a week. I've got all these dates, but I don't think it's too important.

Mr. Metzler: That's okay. Dates are not the key here.

Capt. Aitken: Then we were assigned to escort a group of transports with several other destroyers. The transports were hauling Marines who were destined to make a landing on the east coast of Okinawa. We escorted them to Saipan because they weren't ready for them yet. They didn't want to keep them cooped up aboard ship so they went to Saipan so they could run around and do their

exercises and do a lot of things ashore where they could get their physical shape and training back in tune again.

Mr. Metzler: How long were you in Saipan then?

Capt. Aitken: I think about five days, something like that. Then in mid-to-late April, we took them back to Okinawa. We had some skirmishes with a bunch of mines. Floating mines out between Okinawa and Saipan, you never know when you're going to see these things. But they're out there. We shot them and exploded them.

Mr. Metzler: At least you saw them.

Capt. Aitken: At least we saw them instead of letting the mines hit troop ships or us.

Mr. Metzler: So you used visual sighting as the primary way?

Capt. Aitken: Yes, and sometimes you can pick these things up with a "Sugar George" radar which was the surface radar. It's not the easiest thing to pick up.

Mr. Metzler: "Sugar George" radar?

Capt. Aitken: SG. That was our surface radar. We had two radars in CIC, the surface and air. Surface radar was the SG and the air radar was the "Sugar Charlie" we called it, the SC. Each of them had a separate antenna on the mast. The top of the mast had the air search radar. It looked like a bed spring. That's what we called it. It was about the size and shape of a huge bed spring. Then below that was a little dish antenna which was the surface search radar. We went back to Okinawa.

Mr. Metzler: Were any of the other ships lost to mines or have any incidents with mines, or were you able to avoid them?

Capt. Aitken: On this particular run, nobody got hurt.

Mr. Metzler: That's good.

Capt. Aitken: Nobody got hurt. At Okinawa then, we were sent out on the picket line to one of the about twenty radar picket stations around, but mostly north of, Okinawa. Nothing happened to us yet.

Mr. Metzler: Had the landings occurred yet?

Capt. Aitken: Yes, April 1st was the landing on Easter Sunday, “April Fool’s Day.” After that is when we went to Saipan with the Marines.

Mr. Metzler: What was your experience during the landing? You were away from the landing area then and were able to observe it or what?

Capt. Aitken: We got in pretty close to the landing area and were available there if needed for shore bombardment, but they didn’t need it. The landing was fairly peaceful. The Japanese had determined not to fortify and not to defend the beach area. So, our people went ashore fairly easily and thought, “This is a piece of cake.”

Mr. Metzler: Wrong.

Capt. Aitken: But wrong is right. We were there for the landing and the day or so after. Constantly on submarine patrol on the outside of the landing area. Patrolling for aircraft, kamikazes.

Mr. Metzler: So, no Japanese aircraft yet.

Capt. Aitken: No, not yet. I guess they started coming in volume just a few days after the Okinawa invasion. Why they waited we will never know.

Mr. Metzler: They definitely knew something was coming, just didn’t know exactly when, I’m sure.

Capt. Aitken: Hopefully.

Mr. Metzler: So you’re on picket duty north of the island.

Capt. Aitken: Yes. A few airplanes came by. Although we fired, we didn’t shoot anything down on that run at that particular time. While on picket station, there were two of us destroyers, but on another adjacent picket station they suffered some losses. One of the destroyers that got hit by one or more kamikazes had to go back to port for repairs.

Mr. Metzler: When they go back into port, where is that now, Saipan?

Capt. Aitken: No, they went to Kerama Retto which is a group of islands off the southwest corner of Okinawa. It became very quickly and popularly known as the graveyard of destroyers because when you got hit, that’s where you went. It’s like where’s the nearest hospital? That’s it. If you weren’t sunk.

We were ordered to relieve that destroyer on an adjacent picket station. I think there were about sixteen of these picket stations around Okinawa. Roughly in a circle but more concentrated from the west to the east sides over the north because that's principally from where the kamikaze aircraft come from the southern Japanese island of Kyushu. We relieved that destroyer and had some skirmishes there. This is where we first took control of aircraft and shot down our second kamikaze.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me what a skirmish was like.

Capt. Aitken: A skirmish is an attack by a lone one or two aircraft, Japanese aircraft coming by on their way to a troop landing area. Our mission out there on all of these radar picket stations was three fold. One, to identify and report to the command in the landing areas at Okinawa any enemy surface or aircraft vessels or ships or planes coming by and to destroy them if we could. Then thirdly, to control the U. S. aircraft if any were assigned to us. Many of the picket stations, particularly in the northern areas, were given fighter airplanes by the carriers or from land bases at Okinawa which by then were available to them. They sent out a group of two, four, eight, or twelve fighter aircraft depending upon what the situation looked like it was going to need. There would be Marines flying F4U Corsairs or Navy pilots flying F6F Hellcats. We were assigned twelve Marines in F4U Corsairs. That's another aspect for which I'm lifelong thankful because those Marines earned their pay in those days and we worship them.

Mr. Metzler: When you say "you were given some aircraft" then you basically control them, direct them.

Capt. Aitken: That's right. We had radar, our air search radar would reach out to fifty or more miles. Today, you know, you do a lot better than that.

Mr. Metzler: Sure.

Capt. Aitken: Our maximum was about fifty or more miles, as I recall, depending upon the size of the planes and the group. We would pick them up and then tell the Marines in these F4Us "we got bandits" as we called them approaching from such-and-such a bearing, be it 285 or 310 degrees on the compass or from where ever they were coming and approximate range. We could give some estimation as to the altitude but not too accurately. Then they would buzz out and pick them up and hopefully shoot them down or divert them or something. Discourage them. If they came into our ship then we'd fire on them. It was a new experience for all of us. I owe my life, again, to that commanding officer and other officers on the bridge, and our gunnery officer,

and those Marines were another thing. I'll talk about them when we get to another battle.

Following that, we went back into port and loaded up on stores again. Ammunition because we did use some and fuel oil. Then back to Kerama Retto.

Mr. Metzler: At this point you had some kills, or not, aircraft wise?

Capt. Aitken: Oh, I forgot to say we got one kill at night on our way up to Okinawa from Ulithi. We thought it was likely a Japanese Betty which is a twin-engine bomber. Then we went back to Kerama Retto to load up on stores. Then we received orders to go out to radar picket station #15 which was our fatal station.

Mr. Metzler: You're headed out to radar picket station #15.

Capt. Aitken: But by that time, the kamikazes had become a very major factor in the Battle of Okinawa. We then were ordered into port close to Okinawa at Ie Shima to take aboard a special crew of radar and fighter director people. I think there were about six or seven of them. They had just come off of another destroyer which had had a lot of action out there and another one before that. These guys were sent back into the, excuse the expression, hell-hole time after time. They had a lot of experience. I think they came from an aircraft carrier in directing planes. They were very good at what they did. They came aboard our ship and came with us into CIC. They took over control of the aircraft because they were very experienced in this sort of thing. Not that we couldn't do it but they were much better.

Mr. Metzler: They'd had the experience.

Capt. Aitken: They'd had the experience much more than we had. By that time, as I said, the kamikazes were coming in regularly on most all of the picket stations north of Okinawa. We knew that we were going to be in for trouble. We just knew it.

Mr. Metzler: How many guys came on board?

Capt. Aitken: Half-a dozen. Two officers and about four men.

Mr. Metzler: Were they all crowded into the same area you guys are? All around the electronics and everything?

Capt. Aitken: Yes, and it's a small room. The whole room is about the size of this room here that we're in.

Mr. Metzler: That's big for a destroyer.

Capt. Aitken: Yes. It was probably two-thirds of the size of this area.

Mr. Metzler: Maybe a 15 x 15 or something like that.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, I guess. All black, of course. Ceilings, floors, walls are all black. No portholes. We couldn't see anything out of that room. Dim red lights. Our primary lighting came from the plotting boards, aircraft and surface plotting boards and the radar scopes. We had a surface search radar on one side and the adjacent plotting table for it. Air search radar was over on the other side with the adjacent air plotting table. Hanging from the overhead we had various microphones, speakers, and electronics gear.

Mr. Metzler: It actually sounds pretty high-tech for the time. You know, we have this mental image of not having all of that in World War II but you were blessed with that in this late-model ship.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, this was the first class of a destroyer which had constructed from start a CIC. The others were a modified compartment up close to the bridge. Normally, it was a division commander's stateroom. They usually had a special stateroom on destroyers for the division or the squadron commander who would be in command of a division or squadron of destroyers. So, they just took that room away and made a CIC out of it on the older destroyers. But we had one specially constructed.

We got those people aboard and went out on radar picket station #15. We got one that night. I don't remember what kind of plane it was. We generally had General Quarters operations all night long.

Mr. Metzler: How do you know you got one? Here you are in a room totally dark, no windows.

Capt. Aitken: I didn't see it. The gunnery officer and the captain up on the bridge knew they got him because they could see it. They could see it fall.

Mr. Metzler: That's the only way you knew you were successful helping them.

Capt. Aitken: That's the only way.

Mr. Metzler: They knew of course.

Capt. Aitken: They knew but I didn't know.

Mr. Metzler: You would get word back "got 'em"? You were listening all the time in real time?

Capt. Aitken: Oh, yes. Great cheering, great cheering and we'd hear it. They would report to us. They'd tell us. We were at General Quarters at least at dawn and at dusk and frequently all night long. At dawn we secured from General Quarters and went to the normal watch which is a four-hour watch. I happened to have the four to eight watch that day in CIC, Combat Information Center. I had gotten off of watch at about 7:45 and went down to the ward room which is the officers' dining area. It's not very big, about the size of this room or less. I was starting to eat my hard boiled egg breakfast and all of a sudden the heavy sounding bell was again heard throughout the ship, "Gong, gong, gong, gong. General Quarters, General Quarters. All hands man your battle stations." Normally, that's all you hear. This time was different. Immediately following "General Quarters, General Quarters, All hands man your battle stations," the word was heard, "Commence firing! Commence firing! Starboard side!" There was something very close.

Mr. Metzler: Came up quick.

Capt. Aitken: Came up quick. A seaplane was approaching low on the water. Didn't get picked up by the radar. Came in low on the water and they started firing right away and they got it before it hit us obviously. That was a sign that, "Hey, we gotta watch it. There's something out there."

Mr. Metzler: The Japanese had picked up on the technique of coming in really low under the radar undetected.

Capt. Aitken: Yes. So, we got that one and it wasn't but a few minutes later that a couple more came in. And then more.

Mr. Metzler: So at this time, your General Quarters, you're back in the CIC.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, I periodically lived there. That was my General Quarters station, my watch station, I stood all the watches there.

Mr. Metzler: Your watch station was there as well.

Capt. Aitken: All of it. That's where I was. I had the opportunity at times to stand as junior

officer of the deck watching the bridge but not much. Just for the experience of it and to see what's going on.

Mr. Metzler: Just to get a breath of fresh air.

Capt. Aitken: To get a breath of fresh air, yes. But the fresh air wasn't the problem. Incidentally, the executive officer of the ship is the number two in command of a ship. His General Quarters station is in CIC because then he can talk to the skipper right there. They're very close by voice tube. It's non-electronic, just a voice tube. You holler up through this cone-shaped tube.

Mr. Metzler: Just like in the old days.

Capt. Aitken: And you hear it on the bridge very well and vice-versa. He and the CIC officer could talk to the bridge. So that was his battle station as well. Anyway, that started a fateful day for us because as these planes started coming in more and more and heavier, we at that time did have assigned to us twelve Marine F4U Corsairs. They were vectored out to meet these incoming raids which were designated raid one, two, three, four, and five. There were various and sundry estimates as to the numbers in each raid ranging from about twenty to fifty. When the battle was all over, the Combat Information Center as well as the skipper of the ship and the skipper of the other destroyer that was with us and the other "small boys" as we called the landing craft, landing ships that were with us, (they were part of the team, too) all put their estimates together and came up with somewhere around a hundred and-fifty planes coming in at us. The fighter-director said there was a hundred and fifty-six. If you were to walk in this door and take a lid off a jar and let out a hundred and-fifty flies into this room, how are you going to count them? But you could come up with a rough estimate somehow. If he's releasing them in groups of twenty to fifty he could say, "Must be about twenty. Look at this! Gotta be fifty of them." You don't know how many. If someone were to say it was a hundred and-sixty or a hundred and-forty, I'm not going to argue. Nobody knows for sure.

Mr. Metzler: It was a bunch.

Capt. Aitken: It was a bunch. The consensus was around a hundred and-fifty.

Mr. Metzler: This is over what period of time?

Capt. Aitken: That's over a period of an hour and forty minutes.

Mr. Metzler: That is amazing.

Capt. Aitken: This battle lasted an hour and forty minutes. During that time, we got twenty-three shot down confirmed, including the three that hit us. The *Evans*, which was another destroyer which was with us (we were the senior of the two ships), they got nineteen. They were put out of action before we were. They were an older destroyer. Not much, but they were a previous class. They were put out of action in about an hour. We had another forty minutes before we got clobbered.

Mr. Metzler: Do you get the sense that these aircraft were sent out particularly to target the picket line vessels or were they, to an extent, on their way to other parts of our fleet and you were just the first to intercept them?

Capt. Aitken: I'd say it's both. Their ultimate objective was to get to the landing area and crash anything they could see—troops, ships, supply ships, beach installations, anything they could crash into and sacrifice their life but create big damage. When doing so, they had to pass over or get through our umbrella. Getting through the umbrella meant serious damage to them because of our fighter aircraft and the guns that we had. We had certain maneuvering latitude. We were supposed to maneuver in an area between a certain latitude and longitude and stay in that general area. Then the commander of that particular group of ships at that picket station had total latitude as to what to do, but he had to stay in those general parameters.

The battle went on. I have to tell you I did not see, personally, any single kamikaze. Neither did the executive officer. Neither did any of the people in CIC see any single kamikaze.

Mr. Metzler: Except on the screen.

Capt. Aitken: Except on the screen. We saw piles of them there. It got to a point where this expert team of air controllers were helpless because the fighter pilots don't want to be bothered with somebody telling them, "Hey, look here's a fly over here! Here's one over here!" They can see them all. They're within visual range of all these guys and they had to do their own tactics to take them out one by one.

Mr. Metzler: They could only deal with them one at a time anyhow.

Capt. Aitken: That's right. There's no point in trying to tell them there's one over here. They had their own people in the air there watching, "Hey, Charlie, you got one on your tail!" "Okay," and zoom off this way. But the CIC isn't going to tell them that. We can't make that close a determination. So at one point, the hands were free. There's nothing you can do but just let these guys fight it

out.

Mr. Metzler: You put them together and now you're going to have to see how it comes out.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, put them together. That's the word for it. You put them together and get them in contact with each other and let them take over the dogfight. You can't run a dogfight from a ship.

Mr. Metzler: Absolutely not.

Capt. Aitken: Now, the skipper and the gunnery officer were both Academy graduates, both very seasoned. The skipper, as I told you before, had a lot of battle experience and had battle hits and all in the Philippines. The gunnery officer was an Academy graduate. He had a lot of experience from before. He had one destroyer sunk underneath him and he was swimming in the water. He knew what he was doing. He came aboard our ship as a gunnery officer. Actually, he was two days older than I. He went into the Naval Academy at an earlier age than normal and, of course, after Pearl Harbor they graduated them early anyway so he had two early bumps. He got commissioned and went right out in the battlefield.

The battle went on for an hour and forty minutes. Somehow, in accordance with the textbook, after you get hit, that's the end of the story, and that was the end of this story. There were no more kamikazes.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about getting hit.

Capt. Aitken: Oh, we felt it. There wasn't any question about when we got hit because a ship our size, three hundred and seventy feet long approximately, hit by an airplane at a high speed, you know it. You can feel our ship's guns going off. The five-inch have a concussion. But when an airplane hits you, you know it.

Mr. Metzler: That's without any bombs on the airplane going off.

Mr. Aitken: That's right. One plane dropped a bomb just before he hit on the afterdeck house and completely wiped out a 40mm crew. There was nothing left of the gun and nothing left of them. They were gone. Set fires going with ammunition exploding and gasoline exploding and so on. On the 0-1 deck, as we called it (it's on the deck just above the main deck of the ship) is where the guns were mounted, the 40mm and the 20s and the torpedoes were up there. Incidentally, my personal room was on the main deck just underneath that 40mm which I said was totally wiped out.

Mr. Metzler: So it's good you were--

Capt. Aitken: At my battle station like I was supposed to be. That's exactly right.

Mr. Metzler: You weren't seasick or something and couldn't make it.

Capt. Aitken: No, no. After that plane and its bomb hit, we knew that, there was smoke and we could smell it and then a matter of minutes later, another airplane went through the rigging of the ship and knocked out a whole bunch of radio antennas. It just luckily missed crashing on the ship. The diagram shows the airplane going through the rigging between the area where CIC and the radio room are and the #1 smokestack, funnel as they call it. His wing went through there. He had turned his plane and was trying to hit the ship but he missed the ship and his wing went through there. Clipped all these antenna off and he crashed in the sea.

Mr. Metzler: Did this take out all of your radar capability?

Mr. Aitken: Radar, no. Radio, yes. Lots of radio antennas went out. That was number two hit. Number three hit then was the fatal one because he hit the ship right where the water comes up on the side of the ship at the waterline. He had a bomb which left the airplane, we think, at the concussion, when the nose hit the ship. The bomb went right underneath the ship and exploded. It was like a mine going off directly underneath the ship. The keel was broken at that point in that it was humped up fifty-six inches. That's close to five feet. This much. About this much up. The whole keel at this point for about fifteen feet was humped up like this.

Mr. Metzler: But it didn't break.

Capt. Aitken: Well yes, but it punctured a lot of holes in there. Water was coming in.

Mr. Metzler: Of course.

Capt. Aitken: But when you do that in an engineering space--now this plane hit us at the bulkhead, at the wall between the forward engine room and the after fire room. There are four engineering spaces. If that's the bow and this is the stern, you have the fire room (boilers) and engine room (reduction gears and shafts). Then there is a second fire room and engine room.

Mr. Metzler: We're working from bow to stern, right?

Capt. Aitken: Bow to stern.

Side a ends and side b begins

Mr. Metzler: Okay, go ahead, Doug.

Capt. Aitken: This plane which hit us at the water line, hit at the bulkhead between the forward two engineering spaces and the after two engineering spaces and opened them up to the water. We've got the forward engine room and the after fire room open to the sea instantly. The water is pouring in. Thousands of gallons instantly into there. The bulkhead between the after fire room and the after engine room broke, too. So, now we've got three engineering spaces out of four filled with water almost instantly.

Mr. Metzler: So she's going down.

Capt. Aitken: The forward fire room which is the forward-most engineering space held. The guys in there knew what had happened. They secured the boiler, fortunately. Otherwise, it could have blown up and then we would have been down at the bottom. Most of the guys in those two spaces died pretty fast. The ship took on a list right away, about a five-degree list. The ship settled to the point where the decks were just awash on the starboard side aft.

Mr. Metzler: What's going on in the CIC area while all of this is going on? Describe that.

Capt. Aitken: We could sense the list and first of all, power went out. All power was lost because we couldn't generate any power. We had an emergency diesel generator but nothing to run everything on the ship. All power was lost. We sensed that and we sensed the list so we opened the doors and went out and could see all this commotion and all this smoke. We didn't know what was going to happen. Pretty soon, within a minute or two, the captain said, "Prepare to abandon ship!" That means get all the wounded over the side. When he was informed by the engineering officer and the first lieutenant, who is the damage control officer, that the ship is in sinking condition with three engineering spaces flooded, by the book it's not supposed to stay afloat. With this list, no power, and he knew that the shafts were broken by this humping underneath and one shaft was driven back into our rudder. We couldn't steer. So, you know, you're pretty helpless. No power, no steerage.

Mr. Metzler: Do you know if the attacks continued even after the ship was hit?

Capt. Aitken: That was the last hit that we suffered of three. One going into the engineering spaces. The kamikazes sort of disappeared.

Mr. Metzler: I guess they would go on to something else.

Capt. Aitken: We think we got most of them. Between us, the other ship, and the other small ships that were with us, and the aircraft we think we got most of them but were never sure. At that point, we didn't much care. We knew we were out of it and our job had been done. If there had been more kamikazes, they could have taken us and sunk us just as simple as that because we were dead in the water. Been no question about it. But there weren't any more there.

I have to tell you about the Marines. They shot so many planes down they ran out of ammunition. Ran out of ammunition.

Mr. Metzler: These are in the Corsairs.

Mr. Aitken: In the Corsairs. But those guys went underneath a Jap plane diving on our ship. Went underneath him and forced him up and away from the ship. They came onto others who were headed down and they rode him down. The Japanese pilot could see our Marine coming right down on top of him so he had to lower his plane. So he ran into the ocean. Those Marines were absolute daredevils. That's another factor in saving our lives. There are so many things for which we're thankful. We're thankful to those guys.

Then after that, we had a couple of destroyers that heard all this commotion on the radios. All the radios were going like mad until this plane ran through our antenna. They knew we were in deep trouble so a couple of our others came nearby us. When we abandoned ship they picked up some of the wounded and took them off to hospital ships. A couple of other destroyers did that. Other small ships picked up our floating sailors out there who were floating around in their life jackets or on rafts (there were no lifeboats) and took them aboard.

When we developed the heavy "list", immediately the skipper called in two of these landing craft to close our ship closely and tie themselves to our bollards which are these heavy steel posts on deck. Wire themselves to us so that we would not capsize. One to keep the starboard side up and the other one to keep the port side down.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me again why these landing ships are in the area out here on picket duty.

Capt. Aitken: On a picket station, most of them, I'm not sure that all of them did or not, but we had assigned to us an LSM(R) which is the Landing Ship, Medium (Rocket). These guys are a landing ship to land troops or tanks or trucks. They're big; they're a pretty good-size ship but not as big as a destroyer. They typically, this R-type designation on them, they had rockets on them. They could stand offshore and fire salvos of rockets ashore. You've seen

those pictures.

Mr. Metzler: Yes, I've seen the pictures of them.

Capt. Aitken: They also had mounted in the well of the ship an open five-inch 38 mount which, when they fired that thing, must have shaken the daylights out of the ship. They got at least one plane themselves with that gun. They had a couple of 40s and 20s, I guess on there, too. Three other smaller ships LCIs, Landing Craft, Infantry, had a bunch of small arms. They had 20s and 40s mounted on theirs, but they didn't have any five-inch. But they represented some firepower.

Mr. Metzler: So you put them out there.

Capt. Aitken: They were put out there with us. They were popularly referred to as the "pall bearers" because when the destroyers got hit, they could come in and close us and help us. We recognized that term immediately because they were pall bearers for us because we were sick. We were done. Two of them tied to us and others went out there and picked up all the guys. Brought the ones who were in good shape back to the ship. Transferred those who were in bad shape, and some of them died by then, to destroyers or whatever else to take them to hospital ships and other bigger ships for medical attention. Our official log at the end of that one day shows we lost twenty-six guys killed in action and sixty-something wounded. But the reports later on, official reports which are now in our Bureau of Naval Personnel in Washington which we have a copy of, now shows there were a hundred and-twenty guys were wounded and thirty killed in action or died within the hour or so.

Mr. Metzler: What was the size of the crew totally, roughly?

Capt. Aitken: Three hundred and forty enlisted and twenty-two officers. About three hundred and sixty-two. There was always somebody in transit to or from the ship.

Mr. Metzler: It's about a third of the total crew was either killed or wounded.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, a little more than a third.

Mr. Metzler: Here's the ship. It's got the two landing craft stabilizing it one on each side. So what happened?

Capt. Aitken: Then it looked like one could handle it, so one moved out front to the bow and started taking us in tow to Ie Shima Island which was the closest point of

land to where we were. Before they got very far two fleet tugs came out much better equipped, much sturdier and very powerful. One of them took the lead at the tow. Another one came alongside and lashed itself to us; started their fire hoses and pumps and released the “pall-bearers” from their duties. But you know, it became almost senseless to continue pumping because as fast as they pumped, it was coming in the bottom. We didn’t know how bad that bottom was damaged. We really didn’t know until we got a diver to go down and look at it at Ie Shima. He went down and looked at it and said, “You got a lot of sieve holes down there. The water’s coming in as fast as you pump it out.” There’s no point in trying to pump anything out there except that maybe they could patch up the bulkhead better in the interior where it had broken through in a machine shop. Patch up with mattresses and that sort of thing and pump it out but it’s not too good an operation.

Mr. Metzler: Listening to the extent of damage it almost sounds like it’s a wonder the ship didn’t just go down.

Capt. Aitken: It is, absolutely. It’s a wonder. A wonder. At Ie Shima the patch job was only more mattresses and lumber. Then they took us in tow after about three days there down to Kerama Retto, which is as I explained before, the graveyard of destroyers. We joined other destroyers down there in somewhat similar conditions.

I have to diversify for a moment: When we were on our way out to radar station 15, we passed by a destroyer, the USS *Aaron Ward*, a famous name. There was a previous *Aaron Ward*, too, but this was an up-to-date *Aaron Ward*, identical to ours except they were equipped for laying mines. The *Aaron Ward* was constructed in the same shipyard we were, San Pedro Bethlehem Steel in California. They were three weeks ahead of us in keel-laying, in commissioning, in leaving for underway training, going to Pearl Harbor. Three weeks ahead of us all the way around. Three weeks ahead of us going into Ulithi. They left Ulithi three weeks early to go up and lay mines. When we were escorting Marines back from Saipan, we heard their battle cries and their losses. They were hit by seven kamikazes. All topside. No engineering casualties whatsoever. So, they were under full steam themselves, but the topside looked like the wrath of God. They were at Kerama Retto for temporary repairs prior to steaming back to the U. S. We steamed by them slowly, hailed them, and gave them a salute little knowing that three weeks later, or a little less than that, we would be tied alongside them for the same darn reason. Which was interesting.

Mr. Metzler: What a coincidence.

Capt. Aitken: So we tied alongside the *Aaron Ward* and our topside was damaged nothing like theirs. One of their guys hollered over and said, “Who threw that hand grenade in there?” Which didn’t make our sailors too happy.

Mr. Metzler: No, they didn’t see the underside of your ship.

Capt. Aitken: They didn’t see the underside of our ship. After we got into Kerama Retto, we waited our turn to go into a floating dry dock. A floating drydock is a non-self-propelled drydock which is towed out there for the purpose of handling small ships like destroyers and others. It couldn’t take on a cruiser. We waited our turn for the drydock then entered the drydock and at that point the ship was drained. All the flooded engineering spaces still had water in them. The rest of the bodies were removed at that time. This is some weeks after the big battle. Based upon condition and identity, some were buried immediately at sea or taken ashore for burial on Kerama Retto. Earlier, others were buried immediately following the battle at sea or at Ie Shima. I have photos of a couple of the nice grave sites at Kerama Retto. It all had to be done quickly, with brief ceremony, as best possible.

Mr. Metzler: No, not good enough but–

Mr. Aitken: Not good enough but we did it. After getting into the drydock and seeing the extent of the damage and I have pictures to show you here of the damage underneath. It’s very interesting. We were patched up. They put a heavy steel plate over where the airplane went into the side of the ship at the water line. They put patches over all the holes in the bottom. Put a steel I-beam or two, a patch work of steel I-beams underneath to hold the ship together. They towed the drydock with us up on the blocks from Kerama Retto around the southern end of Okinawa into Buckner Bay. General Buckner had been killed by that point and the cove was renamed Buckner Bay. We came out of the drydock there; tested the ship for leaks and found none. Loaded up with stores and fuel for our two undamaged boilers in the forward fire room and diesel for our emergency diesel generator. We could now have power, lights, and hot water for the long trip to San Francisco, by the tow-line.

Mr. Metzler: That is a long tow.

Capt. Aitken: Roughly it is seven thousand miles at seven knots. It took us three days less than two months to make that trip. We had a little respite at Saipan for about six days following the typhoon. And one at Eniwetok where we all enjoyed a can of beer aboard ship. Nobody went ashore but we had some beer aboard locked up. The skipper authorized a breakout of two cans of beer per man. Of course, at that point there were only about a hundred of us aboard ship

taking her back.

Mr. Metzler: At this point was the Battle Okinawa over with? Was the war over with? I'm trying to get a sense for the time lapse.

Capt. Aitken: The last major battle on Okinawa ended 21 June when the 6th Marine Division raised the U.S. flag on the southern end of the island. Skirmishes there and in other parts of the Pacific continued a while. The first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima 6 August and the second on Nagasaki on 9 August. Emperor Hirohito offered his surrender on 15 August and the formal surrender on the USS *Missouri* was held on 2 September. We aboard the *Hadley* were at Saipan on our way home when the two big bombs were dropped and were at sea between Eniwetok and Pearl Harbor when the formal surrender was signed on the *Missouri* 2 September 1945.

From Okinawa to Saipan weather reporting wasn't so good in those days. There was a typhoon brewing and we didn't know it. We didn't get reports of that. So, we went through the edges of a typhoon under tow. Now if you can picture the swells and going into the swells, you really have to be very careful because the tow line tends to stretch and contract like this. There's a big catenary down there because the tow line is never all out of the water. If it did, it would snap. There was a big catenary which can take up the give. In order to preserve our lives the tug and the *Hadley* extended that catenary a long way.

At this point it is interesting to note that during the almost two-month trip under tow from Okinawa to San Francisco, the tow line parted (broke) nine times, but not once during the typhoon!

Mr. Metzler: You got a really long line between your ship and the tug.

Capt. Aitken: A real long line and the tug did not try to make any headway. Very, very little headway—just keep up headed into the swells and the wind.

Mr. Metzler: Just ride it out.

Capt. Aitken: Ride the thing out. If that line broke and we got caught in the trough, we would capsize immediately. We owe our fortunate state to the fact that while back at Kerama Retto (Okinawa) a lot of heavy weight was added to the bottom of the ship.

Mr. Metzler: Like ballast.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, right. And also, a lot of the topside weight was removed. All ten torpedoes were jettisoned immediately following the battle. All the depth charges were taken off immediately following the battle. When that topside weight is taken off and the bottom weight is added, that lowers the center of gravity materially. Then all this damage on the top of the ship where my room was and others, all that steel and composite and whatever else is back there, all those rooms were torched off by the people in the drydock and dumped over the side. There was no point; it was useless. A lot of topside weight disappeared and a lot of bottom side weight was added. That helped us a lot. We rolled way beyond our survival rate. We rolled fifty-seven degrees at one point. They measured it on the bridge.

Mr. Metzler: That's just about right on your ear.

Capt. Aitken: Pretty close to it.

Mr. Metzler: Did they tow all of the damaged destroyers on drydocks of their own all the way back? This is unusual.

Capt. Aitken: Oh, no. I guess I was not clear earlier. The *Hadley* was towed in the drydock from the repair base at Kerama Retto only to Buckner Bay, Okinawa, about a six-hour tow. There we were taken out of the drydock and towed (in the sea) by the tug to the shipyard in San Francisco. I am not aware of any destroyers being towed back in a drydock

Mr. Metzler: It was pretty much damaged beyond repair.

Capt. Aitken: Did I mention before what the engineers said in Hunter's Point, San Francisco, when we got there? We pull into Hunter's Point and we were so glad to get home. All the parents and all the rest of the guys were here. Within the first two or three days we were there, the engineers from Hunter's Point who were in charge of repairs, climbed down in the engine rooms and fire rooms and they came out quickly. Their statement was, "Who the hell said they could repair this thing? Scrap it." They took out our mast and gave it to another ship which lost its mast. They took off one of our twin five-inch 38 mounts forward. Lifted it off with a huge crane and put that onto another destroyer.

Mr. Metzler: You became a parts ship.

Capt. Aitken: We became a salvage ship for all kinds of equipment and parts. When that was all done we were decommissioned on the fifteenth of December 1945 and we all went our separate ways.

There were other ships towed back but this is one of the most unusual ones, I think.

Mr. Metzler: Did you get close to some of your fellow crewmen while you were on the ship? Good buddies that you stayed in contact with?

Capt. Aitken: Yes, two of the young officers like me, both ensigns at the same time I was, were ushers in my wife's and my wedding a couple of years later. I've stayed in contact with a number of them. Of the twenty-two officers on the ship, there are three of us living. Two of them are not in good shape. I sit here before you just being fortunate. Just being fortunate. One of the two ushers is gone and the other one is still living although he's not in good shape.

Mr. Metzler: Were you able to stay in contact with family at all during all of this action, during your Pacific time?

Capt. Aitken: We wrote letters but they left the ship sporadically. Maybe my folks got two or three letters at one time. Maybe they'd go for a month or so and not hear anything.

Mr. Metzler: They didn't know what kind of action you were in, I guess.

Capt. Aitken: No, they didn't until, I guess it was probably in about June or so, a brown envelope arrived at my parents' home from the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet. They thought, "Uh-oh, what's going on?" As I get to thinking about it, normally they don't do it that way.

Mr. Metzler: No, they send somebody out.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, that's right whenever they can or send a telegram a lot of times. The letter was to advise that we had a big battle and that if you've not heard any news by now, your son is okay.

Mr. Metzler: That was nice.

Capt. Aitken: I didn't see the letter but they said they got one like that. I got mail from them and my girlfriend at the time now and then. It was a great time when mail came aboard. It was pretty hard tracing ships all around the Pacific, there being hundreds and hundreds and hundreds—

Mr. Metzler: I would think so. It's amazing they even got any mail on some of those ships.

Capt. Aitken: It is. It's amazing. Then after the ship was decommissioned we all went our

own ways. It wasn't until 1970, some twenty-five years later, that they put together a reunion. I was not involved in that reunion. We had a death in our family and I didn't go and I didn't participate particularly. That turned out fairly successful although very small because they couldn't get hold of many people. 1970 was the first one and then we put on another one in '75. I went to that and I helped with that one. In '75 it was a case of hey, we gotta hold one sooner. We can't wait five years for another reunion so we did another one in three years. After that went on, then we said, no, we gotta have one every two years. From then on it was every two years. From then on another guy and I do them together until he passed away. I've been running them for the last ten or fifteen years.

Mr. Metzler: What's your view of the Japanese? They were your enemy; you saw what they were doing. How do you feel about them today and how is that different from before you went to the war?

Capt. Aitken: I guess today I have seen, I have not met particularly, some old Japanese veterans. Guys that I'm sure were in World War II. I always wonder what you did. I wonder where you were. It hasn't particularly bothered me. Particularly the younger folks. I have no problem. They weren't responsible at all. The older guys I often wonder. I guess I don't hold anything against them but I wish that they would admit or say something about what went on and why Manchuria. Maybe you've read about that.

Mr. Metzler: Yes, and all the prisoner of war camps.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, all those things. I often wonder about those. But I just think that that was their job. That's what they were expected to do. As individuals, maybe it's not their responsibility. But times are passing and when I see what is happening here today with this symposium and the fact that Helen McDonald has brought together so many Japanese soldiers and sailors to meet the person who fought against them. What a joyous meeting it is and how happy an occasion it is for both sides. That tends to melt all things away.

Mr. Metzler: I guess it says time heals all wounds ultimately.

Capt. Aitken: Yes, I guess it does.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me how this experience changed you as a person, this Pacific War experience which you described to me today. You went in as a young ninety-day wonder, kind of inexperienced in these kinds of things, and you came back. Compare and contrast the Doug Aitken before and after.

Capt. Aitken: Much more experienced. A bit wiser. Appreciative of foreign countries.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about that.

Capt. Aitken: I didn't get ashore in Japan but I did get ashore in Okinawa and several of the Pacific Islands. Since then we've done an immense amount of travel in foreign countries. Other people have various and sundry ideas as to how a country should be run and how they operate. I have to say, as a true patriot, that we're enjoying the finest country the world has ever seen and freedom is what it's all about. If they could only get freedom into their countries so their people could participate in their government and their operation, the world would be a better place.

Mr. Metzler: You said you went onshore in Okinawa. This was when?

Capt. Aitken: Okinawa and Kerama Retto both all the same place. It would have been '45 while we were there.

Mr. Metzler: Was this before or after the big skirmish when the ship was hit?

Capt. Aitken: It was after.

Mr. Metzler: So this is while you were being repaired.

Capt. Aitken: Repaired and patched up, yes. We went ashore for a beer party and all that. I got pictures of those things, too. I got a lot of pictures from the ship collected over the years from a lot of sources. Yes, I went ashore and saw some terrible damage. But we look at it as that's war.

Mr. Metzler: It was a war zone.

Capt. Aitken: That's a war zone.

Mr. Metzler: Contested war zone.

Capt. Aitken: That's what we expected to see and saw. It didn't really affect me. I feel so fortunate because I don't think that I had any personal mental disturbances from the war. I certainly didn't have any physical ones. I sit before you unscathed now. If it weren't for the skipper and the gunnery officer who—the skipper ran that ship with twenty-seven knots or better with wide, sharp turns and sharp maneuvers to avoid planes and to put the guns in the proper position for the gunnery officer to utilize them to shoot down kamikazes. The gunnery officer, his judgment as to which guns to come to bear on which

planes and groups. And the fact that we had all these other ships with us. We were the senior ship. The USS *Evans*, a great ship. If it hadn't been for their being there. If it hadn't been for the small boys, the pall bearers. If it hadn't been for us. If it hadn't been for the Marine pilots we had. Any part of those factors taken out of there and there would have been a lot more destruction than there was because it took all of us to repel what we had. Absent any one of those major factors: the command, the gunnery, the other ships, and airplanes, and so on, maybe I wouldn't be here.

Mr. Metzler: Do you feel like observing all of the damage and seeing death and that kind of thing does that harden you to that? I heard you say that when you went ashore and saw Okinawa it was kind of matter of fact.

Capt. Aitken: That's the way it is. Well, yes, I don't know if it did. I guess it makes me a little more—yes, I think it's a little more hardened to death. When it happens in my own family it's still a tragedy, you know, personal. We did see a lot of it. When a plane crashes into a groups of guys who were in the gun mount, you can't identify people. You've just got chunks of stuff. The only thing to do with that is throw it over the side.

Mr. Metzler: What can you do.

Capt. Aitken: It just goes over. You can't put them together.

Mr. Metzler: No.

Capt. Aitken: You haven't got time and then the right thing to do is bury at sea.

Mr. Metzler: Right.

Capt. Aitken: The only way.

I enjoyed a continued Naval career, too. I stayed in the Navy the rest of my life. I liked it. I was in the "line," as they called it in the war days. I was a line officer which means eventually you would succeed to command. But I noted that all the rest of the line officers aboard ship, they had to spend a terrible amount of time at sea. I didn't want to do that. I wanted to do something else in the Navy, so I switched. I applied to the regular Navy to be accepted in the regular Navy into the Navy supply corps because my major was accounting in school. I was accepted. I became USN instead of USNR and went to some shore stations and we got married.

Mr. Metzler: When did you retire?

Capt. Aitken: I took my uniform off in '74 thirty-one years after I put my uniform on in '43. But then at the same time, I was working on some Navy special programs which were the Navy's newest and most secretive weapons systems and procedures working for the Undersecretary of the Navy for the next ten years. That was some of the most fascinating parts of my Navy career. I think my duty on an aircraft carrier also was just superb. Feeding twenty thousand meals a day and all the business aspects of a small city.

Mr. Metzler: That's a whole other type of operation, isn't it?

Capt. Aitken: Twelve to fourteen tons of food a day; a "city" of five thousand men and all services, and clothing, and parts for seventy-five airplanes and the ship.

Mr. Metzler: It's a city.

Capt. Aitken: It's a city, yes.

Mr. Metzler: Doug, thank you for spending the time sharing your experiences especially with the Okinawa battle. Those are real stories. Gives me chill bumps just listening to them.

Capt. Aitken: I've probably forgotten a lot of them, but they come up at our bi-annual reunions.

Mr. Metzler: I bet there are all kinds of stories. I know it's impossible in one sitting to get them all but at least we got a good start. Our paths may cross again and who knows, we'll sit down and we'll get some more stories from you.

Capt. Aitken: Thanks, Ed. As we say, all speeches are ended with "God Bless America."

Mr. Metzler: That's correct. Thanks, again.

Capt. Aitken: My pleasure.

Final
Bonnie Day Rush
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