National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with Robert Van Ausdall
U.S. Army Air Corps

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Interviewed by Ed Metzler

This is Ed Metzler. Today is the 26th of September 2005. I'm in San Antonio, Texas and I am interviewing Robert Lorne (?) Van Ausdall, otherwise know as, "Van." This interview is being done for the National Museum of the Pacific War and the Admiral Nimitz State historic site.

Van; let me start out by thanking you for taking the time today to share your experiences from World War Two with us. I'll start by asking you to give us your full name, date of birth, place of birth and a little bit about your family and parents.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Ok, Ed. I'm Robert L. Van Ausdall and I was born in 1920, April 22, 1920 in the rural area of Ohio. Our mailing address, then, was Camden, C-A-M-D-E-N, Ohio. I was a farm boy and my dad was a renter farmer at that time. However, we ended up owning a couple of farms there and I went all the way through my grade school, and my high school, all in the same building. All twelve years. I was very fortunate, in that, I never missed a day of school in twelve years. Most farm boys were kept out of school sometimes to help with their dad's farming. Dad never believed in that, so I didn't have that problem. I graduated from high school near a place called Eaton, (?) Ohio. That's our county seat.

Mr. Metzler: Brothers and sisters?

Mr. Van Ausdall: I had two sisters only, one older, who died February of this year at the age of eighty-nine. Incidentally, I am, of course, being born in 1920; I'm eighty-five years old now. I have another sister who lives in San Mateo, California. She does some professional photography and she was a professional musician, xylophone player.

After going through high school in 1938, I went to college at Miami University in Ohio. I didn't really know what I wanted to take, but I like music a lot, so I majored in Music Ed.

After two years in college, I made up my mind that I wanted to see some of the world; maybe get away from the farm a little bit. Having seen some things that a Collier Magazine, such in that day, was somewhat like People weekly. Lots of pictures and everything. There was an article about flying cadet training and the West Point of the Air, at Randolph Field. Then they showed pictures and, the barber and I.....I'm a baldy now but, I had hair then.....(laughs). He and I were talking about it and I said, "Say. You know, I'd like to do that." He said, "Why don't you go ahead and try it? They're looking for people about your age." So, I applied for the Air Force

in the Aviation Cadet Program and I was one of the lucky ones that got selected to go. They sent me to Dallas, Texas to Love Field, where I learned to fly. That was my first three months in the military. I enlisted, really, at Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

Mr. Metzler: What aircraft were you training on then?

Mr. Van Ausdall: We were training in the Stearman PT-17, I think it was, or the 18. The 18 had a different engine, the Jacobs engine, I think. I soloed in the fall of 1940 at Dallas and then they sent me to Randolph, which was then called Randolph Field, not Randolph Air Force Base, but there's where I took my basic training, which was in the North American plane called the BT-9. Then went over to Brooks Field for my advanced training and that was where we flew the AT-6 advance trainer.

Mr. Metzler: That's the Texan, isn't it?

Mr. Van Ausdall: The Texan, right, real loud airplane, incidentally.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. They fly in and out of Fredericksburg all the time. They've still got them around.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Not as many as there used to be. So when I graduated at Brook's Field, they were very kind to us then, there was no war yet and they asked us what kind of flying we would like to do most and said I wanted to be in single engine. Hopefully I was wanting to get into fighter planes. They asked me if I had a preference of area of the country. I said, "Being and old farm boy, I haven't been very many places. I always wanted to see the New York area." You know they gave me an assignment to P-40s in Mitchel Field at Long Island, New York. Right what I wanted. What they didn't tell me was that I wasn't going to be there very long.

I went to Mitchel Field and that was in, I graduated May 29 of 1941. Incidentally, Tommy Manville, (?) who was very well known in the construction products, he was at our graduation ceremony. He was a multi-millionaire, I guess, in those days....

Mr. Metzler: That's the old Johns-Manville group?

Mr. Van Ausdall: That's right. I just mentioned that in passing because everybody was all fuzzy about his being down there. But, anyway, when I signed up at Mitchel Field, the Air Force was then expanding quite a bit. Apparently, the British were at war with the Germans and it looked like things were not going to be real good, but there was a lot of activity around the base. I hadn't been there more than a few days when they told us we, and here we are, right out of flying school, they said, "We are going to do some practice aircraft carrier take offs. We didn't know what in the world this was all about, but it sounded like it would be fun.

We practiced taking our P-40s off, which were so new that we hardly could get them off the ground on a normal day; by putting some flaps down and trying to stall them into the air as quickly as we could. We did this for, oh six, or eight, days and then, having not been there, this was what, May, had we not been there until, maybe, June or July, they said, "Now we are going to be taking these planes down to Norfolk and we are going to load you on an aircraft carrier and we are going to go out and used what we just learned.

Mr. Metzler: This is all before Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Before Pearl Harbor and it had never been done. We didn't have tail hooks. We were not flying carrier-based airplanes. We were all wondering what they were thinking about. But, Hap Arnold, who was then a one star, chief of the Air Force, came up and saw us all and we thought, "Boy, must be big stuff if they got the Chief of the Air Force here." He lined us up in front of our airplanes and we had, sort of, an inspection. I can remember him standing in front of me, nose-to-nose, and looking me in the eye and saying, "Hope you can change a tire on this airplane." I said, "Yes sir." I didn't know how to change the tire, but I knew I was going to learn.

After we got away from the little celebrations there, why, we flew to Norfolk……to Hampton Roads, Virginia. Because we could not collapse our wings, like the Navy did, we could not taxi to where the carriers were without having some poles taken down. They took down two, or three, telephone poles, some mailboxes and so forth, so we could taxi those P-40s through the streets. We took them out onto the ramp out next to the carrier. We stayed in the plane. We shut our engines down as they lowered the cable down and they hoisted us up onto the deck of the carrier. We restarted our airplanes and taxied them forward to the elevator that goes to the hanger deck. They were just getting us out of the way so they could-----there were thirty-three of us. Thirty P-40s and three Stearman PT-17s in those days.

Mr. Metzler: Now could you get down the hanger without folding your wings?

Mr. Van Ausdall: No. They didn't actually put us down to the hanger, but they took us to the hanger deck. Our thirty-three planes were on that deck until we flew them off. We left-------.

Mr. Metzler: You remember what aircraft carrier it was?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Oh, sure. It was the *Wasp.* The *Wasp* was the sister ship of the *Hornet,* which is the one Doolittle used a year later. Doolittle was a year after us. As I said, never having done before, we had a lot of talking about how's this going to go, and everything. The captain on the, I forgotten his name, but the captain on the *Wasp* was really good. He knew it would probably be helpful to us if we had little more time to talk to his pilots. So they separated them and gave each one of us a room with one of them for the eighteen-day trip that we took.

We were going across the Atlantic and we didn't know, at that time, where we were going. As soon as we got ten, or fifteen, miles out of the harbor, they called a meeting a told us we that we were headed for Iceland. We were going to take our planes in because there was no way to get them there quickly. The Germans had been bothering our shipping that was going to Russia and the British were having trouble with submarines around Iceland. We were going to be doing things like submarine patrol and looking for any planes that were coming in that direction, and so forth.

After eighteen days, going across the Atlantic, we were still a hundred and seventy-five miles out of Reykjavik, Iceland and at 3:30in the morning, this was in July, it was light then, but we took off, at that hour, and flew that hundred and seventy-five miles into Reykjavik. That's where we landed and were based for the next year. We were there when World War Two broke out.

Mr. Metzler: So, how many times had you taken off of an aircraft carrier in your P-40 before you did that right outside of Iceland?

Mr. Van Ausdall: That was the first time. The first time we ever took off. It was the first time anybody else had taken off.

Mr. Metzler: Your heart must have been in your throat.

Mr. Van Ausdall: It was when the idea of it. But as, the first three to take off were the Stearman's. They took off. They gave you thirty-five knots of wind because of that carrier deck that makes it awful easy to take off. When the

Stearman's took off, we were setting on the ground and we were under them and they were actually going behind us. Because as they climbed, the carrier was------.

Mr. Metzler: Out running the Stearman?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yeah. When we took off, the first guy off said, "Hey guys, just make a normal take off." He didn't think we even needed the flaps, but we used about twenty degrees flaps. Not a one of our people went below the carrier deck, which, as I recall, is about seventy-five feet high. We all made normal take offs. We headed into the air about eighty-five miles an hour, something like that.

Because of the magnetic problems around, near, the North Pole, they had, your compasses were a little bit unreliable. They had us all to line up with the carrier and the carrier gave us the compass setting and we set our, the gyro compass, so we would be, as near as possible, then we kept comparing those with one another, all the way in. No one in our group had ever been to Iceland. Nobody had a map of Iceland, except a road map. We didn't know what, no one in our group had ever flown there, so it was a matter of finding the field and then getting to the airport and getting it on the ground.

Mr. Metzler: So what is the designation of this group now? I mean, you're in a certain squadron---?

Mr. Van Ausdall: I was in the 33rd Pursuit Squadron, which was a part of the 8th Pursuit Group. That was one of the Air Force's major groups in that particular era. We stayed there, in Iceland, for the next year and I was, actually, at that, at Reykjavik, on the field at Reykjavik, at the time World War Two broke out.

Mr. Metzler: You remember hearing about Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Oh yes. We heard about it, but it was a different time of the day. That was eight o'clock in the morning thing and Iceland is already, I don't know what it would have been then, I can't figure what that was.

Mr. Metzler: It was sometime during the night, wasn't it?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yes, during the nighttime.

Mr. Metzler: So, what was the reaction of you and our buddies when you heard that?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Well, it was a shock, I'm sure, throughout. I don't remember specifically, you know, like, where was I and who told us, and all that sort of thing. It was a shock and we knew that definitely we were going to be on the front line, over there.

What we were trying to do, then, was to just report to the British if we were able to find, or spot anything that looked like enemy trouble. We were told, by the Chief of the Air Force, that if any planes came within fifty miles of Reykjavik, we ought to think about shooting them down. Now, we we're not at war. But, the planes came at Reykjavik, mainly they were coming over to try to bomb the bases that the RAF, the Royal Air Force, from Britain, were using. But, they came from Bergen, Norway. They were pretty smart. They never sent planes over until they had had cloud layer to disappear in. We didn't have any radar in those days, so there was no way of knowing when those planes might be coming, except by reports of telephones from the ground.

Mr. Metzler: So these were bombers then?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Those would have been German bombers. Some of them, even, I think, were four engine.

Mr. Metzler: That's the old Condor; those four engine Condors. They had a long-range reconnaissance and bomber.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yes. It was one of those Condors that was parked at Gary, Indiana airport for years. I'm not sure if it was a Condor, but I think that was one that was up there.

The first plane that an American shot down, in World War Two, was shot down in Iceland, but after the war was declared, in August of 1942 in our unit; shot down a Wulf 200, I believe it was, in Iceland. That's sort of a preview of, prior to the days I got involved in the China-------.

Mr. Metzler: So did you actually see any combat while you were in Iceland?

Mr. Van Ausdall: I got some thirty missions that were considered combat missions because, we were going to be in combat status if we ran into them. But it was chasing and hoping, you know? We just didn't have the contact. No, I didn't get to do much shooting while I was up there. They moved us up to

the northern point of, ten miles south of the Artic Circle, to an air base called Akureyi, where we operated north of the Arctic.

Mr. Metzler: Could you possible spell that for our transcriber?

Mr. Van Ausdall: A-K-U-R-E-Y-I. That's there now, I hear. I have not been back to Iceland since 1942.

Mr. Metzler: OK. So, what happened then? Your Iceland chapter is over and-----.

Mr. Van Ausdall: I remember a couple of things of interest there. The Russian Premier, who was it then---Holy mackerel, came through on the way to see President Roosevelt in Washington. They came in and landed at our base at Reykjavik. Anyway, he came through to visit President Roosevelt. I was one of, I think, we had four planes, and went out and escorted that big Russian plane in and he stayed on our base for a couple of days, ate in our mess hall and so forth. Then he flew on back to see Roosevelt. I left Iceland after the war was underway in the summer of '42, in August. So I was here from July of '41 'til August of '42.

Mr. Metzler: Did you get a chance to mix at all with the locals, or to get into see the civilian areas there?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Oh yes. We would go to dinner down at the Borg Hotel in downtown Reykjavik once in a while. They were known to be serving, they have little, miniature horses up there and they were known to serve horsemeat and call it steak. I don't know whether that is right or not, but-----.

Mr. Metzler: What was Iceland like?

Mr. Van Ausdall: An unusual place to be stationed and it was an unusual spot in terms of weather. You probably know that the Vikings settled there and in order to, and they liked it. In order to.....because it is surrounded by the Gulf Stream, it is not brutally cold, like some people would say, "Iceland. Uh-oh." So they said, "Let's call it Iceland." Then, Greenland, which is a terrible, cold glacier, they called it Greenland. That was all part of their philosophy. Never, during the whole year we were there, did we have any heavy snows, and we had some flakes, once in a while. It rarely got below, even, twenty degrees and never got much about sixty degrees in the summertime. That was the thing that was unusual about it.

It was not a great place to fly because we did have some unusual weather patterns that would hit us. We didn't have an awful lot of, we used our own, those three Stearmans I told you about, we used them as weather recon ships. We would take off and fly up and take instrument and put them on the struts out on the wing so we could get temperatures and dew points and make reports back. We used those three planes for a lot of things. I had one interesting mission there. Everyday, we would fly the weatherman and we would take turns flying those missions, once a day.

One day it was my turn to go but they sent down a lieutenant colonel from the Army Engineer Corps with a bunch of instruments and they said that they wanted me to take him to a place where he was going to do some surveying for a possible new airport. They gave me the map and showed me the area they wanted him taken to and I was supposed to land on a field there, a farm. So, I took him out to this area, out on Keprovik, (?) not too far from Reykjavik, but it was out on a little peninsula.

The field we were supposed to land on, we started in on our final approach, it was big enough field, it looked like it would be OK. But a bunch of sheep came across the, just as I was ready to touch down, we had to gun it and go around and I had to chase the sheep off with the airplane. We finally landed and he got out of the plane and he says, "Van, you stay right here with the plane and I might be as much as an hour, but I'll be back." He went around that field and did a lot of work and he came back to the plane and he says, "This is where it's going to be." Then's when I learned what he was trying to find was a place to make a future airport that would be one for the military. Well, the interesting part of that story is that field later became, I think it was called Meek's (?) Field, at first, after one of our pilots who was killed up there. Later on, that field became the International Airport, which is today, Keprovik (?) International, that a lot of people use as they are going across the North Atlantic.

Now, I have never seen it, I have never been there, but I did, someone from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, one time, had a friend who was on the Joint Chiefs, named J.C. Myer. (?) He was one of our pilots in Iceland, and he became a four star general, later on. They got me a photograph of the base.

I do e-mail with a guy in Iceland, right now, he is a young man from my day. He's a fifty-seven year old farmer, but he sends me back e-mails because he's interested in the days we were there to.

I came home in 1942. My pilot, on the way home, it was an American Airlines DC-3, that I was being hauled on, and our pilot was the author of the "High and the Mighty, " which was a very popular book, in those days. I think they said he lives out in Puget Sound, or somewhere in the Northwestern USA. We landed in Bangor Maine. We went through Greenland on the way back and landed in Bangor, Maine and then from that point, I was reassigned to Sarasota, Florida where I trained pilots in aerial gunnery and ground gunnery. One of the men who came down to show us,

what they called, the curve of pursuit, that is being used out here at Victoria, Texas in the training. There was a pilot by the name of, I believe he was a major, by the name of John Dunning (?). John Dunning (?) was from San Antonio, Texas and he, later on, became our group commander in China. That was where I first met him. I rode with him in an AT-6 in Sarasota, Florida back in 1943.

Mr. Metzler: D-U-N-N-I-N-G ?

Mr. Van Ausdall: D-U-N-N-I-N-G. Right. Since we are here at a convention in San Antonio, his wife is still alive, I think she is about ninety-two now, and she was with us. She was down in Fredericksburg with us. I think you have a plaque that her name is on.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah.

Mr. Van Ausdall: John Dunning affected my career in an awful lot of ways, including the time he was my group commander in China. I trained pilots there, in Sarasota and had a lot of interesting experiences there. I don't know if you are interested in any of them, you would probably rather I get into the China days.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. Let's go to China. I mean, if there is anything that stands out, I guess.

Mr. Van Ausdall: I left Sarasota to; I got married in June of '43 and I left there in September, to go back on my next overseas assignment, which was going to be going to India; first to Karachi, India; Karachi, Pakistan now. It was at Karachi that we trained the Chinese pilots that we were later to take into combat. They had been, mostly, were English speaking. They had learned their English and had taken some pilot training in places like Luke and Thunderbird Fields, in Phoenix, Arizona. Most of them were young guys in their twenties, early twenties, twenty-one, twenty-two years old. We were based at a place called Malir, M-A-L-I-R, which was on the outskirts of Karachi. There we did aerial gunnery and ground gunnery and formation and all it takes to just to get them molded in. The whole idea of the, this was the Chinese-American Composite Wing of the Fifth Fighter Group, the whole idea of this group was to see if we could integrate American techniques and methods of flying into the Chinese Air Force and then take them into combat. American system was to always make sure there were two planes together to protect each other and stayed in formation and all that sort of

thing. So we were not there terribly long. I think we were there, maybe, three, two or three months. We had some B-25s that were there also. We took the B-25s and the P-40s and we started our route toward China.

Mr. Metzler: This is all still in Karachi now?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yes. Incidentally, we had to go over, because there were no ports in China that were open to us. They were all controlled by the Japanese at that time. We had to go over, through the Mediterranean, over to North Africa and--- the long way around. All the times I've ever been to China, I've never gone across the Pacific. I have come back after the war, but we had to go, we went over to Oran, (?) North Africa on a liberty ship out of Norfolk. We had to wait there to get transportation on through the Suez Canal and John Dunning was on that ship with me.

We were on our way to China. He was very impatient. He was a wonderful man but he didn't like to sit around waiting for the ship. He wanted to get to combat. So he, actually, he and another fellow, actually left the area. They considered it AWOL, because he wanted to get to, over to Chinault (?) in China and get assigned to a unit and get to flying to where he could do some good. Incidentally, they made it rough for him for a while and then they, eventually, promoted him because they realized, this is the kind of guy we need to have there.

I have one, little, quick incident I want to tell you about there. After eighteen days of being on the ground in Oran, and living in tents up overlooking the Mediterranean. We were told that the next day we would put our stuff together and we were going down, and we were joining an eighteen-ship convoy so that we went through the port. Another Texan and I, a fellow named Glen Ramsey, (?) he and I were both captains, at that time. They called our names, out of the formation. "You two fellows, step forward." So we came up and they said, "We need you to go on a different ship." We said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Our baggage is already loaded and everything." "Don't worry, you can get some socks and shoes and stuff on the ship's store." So, of course, we changed. The reason for us to be transferred is they needed some troop commanders on a different ship.

We transferred. We left on the convoy, which was an eighteen-ship convoy and we were on the front port side of the eighteen ships. The following day, which was one day before Thanksgiving, 1943, a German radio controlled, robot bomb was released toward our ship on that corner site. The ack-ack got so heavy, the Germans, that's the first time we know of, they ever used this kind of a guided bomb, they veered the rocket ship to the second ship, the one behind us. So, it missed us, but it hit the ship behind us, broadside and blew a hole almost through, completely through the ship and it sunk in two hours. There were over twelve hundred people killed and the water was

cold and they were in the water, a lot of them were killed because they were in the water overnight. That was the worst sea disaster, in death, than there was at Pearl Harbor, although, they were not all Americans.

Mr. Metzler: Now where did this occur?

Mr. Van Ausdall: That occurred out of Oran, North Africa in November 29, 1943.

Mr. Metzler: In the Mediterranean?

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. The water was cold that day.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Oh, very, very cold. The horrible part there was not the fact that my baggage went down with that ship, my wedding pictures, my wife wanted me to have one thing, was a sterling silver wedding framed picture, and it went down to. All the ship that we were supposed to be with, all the guys that were going with us into combat, that were in the same kind of work we were going to be in, they went down to and an awful lot of them didn't survive. A lot of friends went down then.

Anyway, we had to continue. Two days later, the next day, there was friendly fighters over, the French and British and American. But, the second day, it was too far away from those and we were hit again with, this time, with dive-bombers. One of them hit so close to our ship that it injured the propeller on the ship and we had a vibration that forced us to go in, we went through the Suez and into Bombay, instead of into Karachi so we could get the work done there. This was all in order to try to get us into where we were going, into Karachi. I told you, already, about our time in Karachi.

Then when we took the plane to go over the Himalayan Mountains, we had, the first day we tried it, we had three B-25's and probably, somewhere in the vicinity of twenty-five, or so, P-40s. We went up to Chadwa (?) in the Burma, in the northeastern India area and we stayed over night there and then we tried to make it over the Hump. We called it the Hump.

The next day, the B-25s had a lot of our ground equipment and they were overloaded and they couldn't maintain the altitude to get over high enough. In only took about eighteen thousand feet, was about the minimum we could go over. We had to turn around and come back and land and then try again the second day. It was even hard to get into China once we were on the doorstep. When we landed in China, we landed at, just north, a few miles, and a few miles north of Kunming, China.

We then went from there on out to our first base, which was to be Kweilin, China, not too far from Kantung. (?) Kweilin, the way we spelled it then was, K-W-E-I-L-I-N. At one time, I've heard that referred to the Paris of China, and I don't think they call it that now. It had very unusual, what they called, inverted ice cream cone hills. It was Sugarloaf hills all over. We even had some caves that were used for aircraft maintenance right next to the airport in some of those hills. The first night we were there, I had a brand new P-40 and, all of us did. In order to get our planes, we were told, "If you want to get a little faster, use sandpaper to sand down the paint, that heavy, OD colored paint. You will get about eight miles per hour more sopped out of it." I didn't know if that was right our not, but it sounds like a good idea. So I, all of us, spent a lot of time sanding our aircraft down. We were parked in big revetments for protection. The only thing that was open was the front end where you could back the plane in. The first night there, the Japanese planes came over and bombed our base and one of those bombs hit, within a few feet of the front of the revetment and my plane was in and absolutely blew it through with holes so bad that we were never able to get to use it.

Mr. Metzler: A brand new plane.

Mr. Van Ausdall: My brand new plane with my wife's name, Marilyn, (?) on the side and I had the, to wait I until I could get another airplane to, as far as a personal plane was concerned.

Mr. Metzler: Now, are we still using the Flying Tiger type open mouth with teeth?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yes. We had them from the beginning; we always had those. Right. At the beginning, we flew some missions out of there but it was getting, the war, kind of hot, in that particular area. It wasn't too long before we had to vacate that base.

Mr. Metzler: Now, at this point, did you have Chinese pilots as well?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yes. We were now with them and this, we were being baptized in our combat days right from the beginning, from the first day. We actually had to depart there a lot earlier than we thought we would. We went on, way out, into another field called Suichwan, S-U-I-C-H-W-A-N in those days. It might be spelt differently now. Out of Suichwan, we operated, we were hit several times out there, there was some real heavy aerial battles right over that field.

Mr. Metzler: Now is this south central China?

Mr. Van Ausdall: No a little more southeast, it would be northeast of Hong Kong and so forth.

Mr. Metzler: OK.

Mr. Van Ausdall: After Sucihwan, we were then transferred; we kept getting kicked out of bases. We went into one called, Heng Yang. I operated out of Heng Yang for a while. That was a good place for us to hit traffic on the Yangtze River and we could strafe troops and their supplies and so forth. We did a lot of, we were using bazookas, among other things, a bazooka was an extended rocket thing that hung under our wing. These were real big ones, big around and about eight, or ten, feet long. We also carried papa-frags (?) and five hundred pounders, two hundred fifty pounders and stuff like that. Of course, our people would use all; they all had fifty caliber guns. Incidentally, I didn't know this during those days, but they tell me this is true. The guns, the shells are all linked together and put into the tray, twenty-seven feet long. They said this is where the term, the whole nine yards, comes from. All of those twenty-seven feet are the whole nine yards. "How many shells you gonna take?" "We're going to take the whole nine yards." I had not heard that, at that time. I'm not sure if it's a true story, but it makes a good one.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me a little about the P-40. What was she like, I mean, was she top of the line, did you love her, did you hate her, tell me about her?

Mr. Van Ausdall: I had to love her, because of the way I got through the war in a ship like that. It was a slow plane, as planes go. Even as fighter planes go, it was not a fast plane. I guess we, I keep remembering the two hundred and ten miles an hour was considered a big cruising speed. It would go up to, maybe, three twenty-five in a dive, but the torque was horrendous. You know, you had to use your trim tabs to be able to even hold it, or it would slide through the air sideways in a dive. The biggest thing about the P-40 was its armor plating, which protected us in the front and in the back, real thick steel armor coating. That's what saved us so many times. If we get into a fight with the Japanese planes, they could out turn us in one turn. It's amazing how they could turn those things, because, some of them were bamboo, they were light and we couldn't stay with that. If they got behind us and shot, we had the protection of that great big steel back there, which they did not have. Whenever we were able to get shots in, our ratio was a little bit better.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have self-sealing tanks?

Mr. Van Ausdall: I don't recall that we did; all, I don't think we did, because, a lot of times, planes blew up and they……

Mr. Metzler: I know the Japanese didn't. They lost a lot of aircraft because it hit the fuel tank.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yeah… Right.

Mr. Metzler: Were there fixed battle lines here, where the Japanese held territory and the Chinese and American held territory in the traditional sense, or was-----?

Mr. Van Ausdall: It would not have been considered traditional, because there were pockets. A lot of pockets that the Japanese would be in and be completely surrounded by Chinese, but they were all operating and doing a very good job of it in these pocket areas. The pockets, often were, followed the river patterns. China didn't have much of a road era. It, kind of, jumped over the road era from, into the airplane era. In the old days, there were not very many roads around China. But, they did a lot of the movement of their troops and their supplies, up and down the rivers and that's where a lot of our action would be.

Mr. Metzler: What were the B-25s used for? That's a medium bomber.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yeah. That's a medium bomber. Our wing had a B-25 group in it and I didn't know near as much about their operation, but they did some bombing from up around Hankow, (?) the Yangtze River and so forth. We escorted the, usually, we would escort the B-25s, but, more importantly, the B-24s were starting to coming into China, the larger, four engine Liberator. We escorted them on some occasions. One night I was asked to lead a two-person mission to try to shoot out the searchlights because the B-24s said they were really zeroing in on them up at Hankow, H-A-N- K-O-W. We went up there and, in the dark; we dived into, the lights were on us. We were diving at them; shooting at them and we finally got them to turn off, which made it possible for the B-24s to continue a little bit safer.

Mr. Metzler: So the B-24s had been flown in, over the Hump, is what I'm getting at?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Not only did they fly in, but the B-24 version, what was the name of it, the B.....it carried cargo and gas, the Liberator that carried cargo and gas. All of our gas remember, had to come across the Hump in planes.

Mr. Metzler: Ammunition, gas, everything.

Mr. Van Ausdall: We fueled our planes out of sixty-gallon drums, with the pumps and everything. It was a, and I'm sure, you know, how the airfields were made over there. They used manpower to pull the big things that excavated, pulled the rollers, maybe, two, three hundred men pulling rollers to pack down the runways. If there was a burial site on the field we were going to build, they would not touch the site. It would end up way up above ground, but they would keep right on digging around. There were burials, grave sites that were up six and eight feet off the ground all over some parts of China where the airfields were because of the fact they did not want to move them.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about the Chinese. Now you had, not only, experiences with them, because they were pilots and support group, but you had the general population, which, I assume, you had some interaction.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Not an awful lot with the general population. We ate Chinese food almost completely. We didn't have very much food shipped in from the US. We had an awful lot of certain kinds; of course, we ate a lot of rice, we ate a lot of eggs, and there were a lot of eggs over there, things of that nature. As far as the people, they were awful supportive and, where ever you go, thumbs would be in the air and, "Ding How," which was, "very good." I always admired the people of China. They're really wonderful people, family people. We got along awfully well with them. We got along real well with our pilots that, the one thing that I noticed was, that even though our pilots spoke English, and did t quite well, all of us want to break into the language we know best when we are in an emergency, and whenever the planes, the Japanese planes, would d hit us, as they were coming in the Chinese pilots were telling each other, they were not telling it in a language I understood, in those days. That made it a little bit difficult. What we did, each one of us, had a counterpart that was Chinese. I was a squadron commander of one of the squadrons of the Fifth Fighter Group. I had, in my squadron, a counterpart, Chinese CO and we all had a, I had an American operations officer but, he, also, had a counterpart, Chinese operations officer. That's the way we did it, the flight commanders and so forth. I only had about twenty-five, or thirty, Chinese pilots and five Americans in my unit. I had about, perhaps, about twenty-five, or thirty, GIs, enlisted personnel, who did

our armament, maintenance and all that sort of thing, administration. We had two, or three, hundred Chinese airmen. So that was the kind of unit I was the CO of.

\Mr. Metzler: So here was far more Chinese than there were Americans?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Oh Yes. Four and five to one.

Mr. Metzler: So how many aircraft were then in this fighter group?

Mr. Van Ausdall: In the group, total, there would have been, little more than a hundred, I guess.

Mr. Metzler: That's a pretty good-sized air force.

Mr.. Van Ausdall: Yes. Pretty good size. I want to tell you, for the numbers, for our numbers, we did a very reputable job of ratios of losses to the Japanese. I know the American volunteer group, which preceded us--------

Mr. Metzler: The, quote, Flying Tigers, unquote.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yeah. They were the real, what you call; I call them the glamour boys……

Mr. Metzler: (unintelligible….talking over each other)

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yes, they got the five hundred dollars for shooting down; they were soldiers of war. They were not military pilots. One of your San Antonio people by the name of Tex Hill, who was awful well known, was one of them. We all knew Tex over there.

Mr. Metzler: Now did they stay on and continue to interact with you guys when you came?

Mr. Van Ausdall: A certain number of them did. Tex was one of them. He became a military pilot and was continued there. Casey Vincent (?) who was the youngest general in the American Air Force history, who at the age of twenty-eight,

was a Brigadier General. He was one of the big shots in the Fourteenth Air Force. Of course, John Dunning, who, someone told me, was the second youngest brigadier general in the Air Force. I didn't know that until I heard that, on this particular trip, that that was true; that he was a very young general.

Mr. Metzler: So when you would go out on a mission then you would be in your aircraft and did you--------? (SIDE ONE ENDS)

SIDE TWO:

Mr. Metzler: Ok Van, let's start side two. I was asking you a big, long-winded question about how you coordinated when you would go into a battle and how many aircraft and, most of them were Chinese pilots. Go ahead.

Mr. Van Ausdall: An awful lot of our flights would be four, or eight ship flights that we would, and since I was a squadron commander, generally, when I was flying, I might be leading the flight and we would stay in a two ship, or four ship formations; in sight of each other and we would decide which way to approach a target. If we were doing something like dive-bombing a bridge, we would do, we would try to skip bomb the bombs into the, underneath the banks of the, where the bridge enters the wall and try to blow bridges up. If it was a matter of a lot of troops that might be firing back, we would try to come in en mass and come at them all at the same time.

In the entire World War Two, I only got two bullet holes in my airplane. I got them one day when I was firing at a whole truck load of, it looked like, about, a two and a half ton truck, loaded with troops, firing back at me with rifles. As I run over them, I could see my bullets, tracers, going into them and I knew I was doing a lot of damage. As I went over, I felt a little ping in my controls and when I got back home, I found out that they had severed one of my rudder cables. The rudder cables are intermingled with each other and if it had been an aileron cable, I would have lost my controls completely. That was the only hit that I got in World War Two, so I had an awful lucky war.

Flying with the Chinese, we would always do the missions, come back home and debrief and then get ready for the next one. But the terrible, painful thing was we would, I sometimes, have beautiful weather, but no gas, or no bombs; none of the things that we needed. We would have to wait until they came over the Hump. General Chenault was extremely good at running a war with limited resources. They would really make the maximum use out of all of those things and try to not waste the resources. That's something he excelled in.

I got to run one mission, and I'll tell you about, because it epitomized, I think, what went on over there. One day, John Dunning, our group commander, he thought up a mission that we all thought, "Well, I wonder if it will work? But it sounds like it might." He wanted to have a flight of P-40s to go hit the most heavily defended Japanese base in China. It was up on the Yangtze River, two hundred and fifty miles from our base, which at that time, Chih Kiang. Americans called it Chih Kiang. I think the Chinese now refer to it as Chih Kiang and the pilots, all of us that were squadron commanders, we all wanted to lead that mission. So we flipped a coin and I won. I won the right to lead the mission. I had twenty-two ships and there was like, four American pilots and the rest of them were all Chinese, eighteen, or twenty, Chinese.

We took off from Chih Kiang Air Base to go across all of Hunan Province and across the Tangting Lake, (?) which is the biggest lake in central China. Real flat country. We stayed extremely low. We didn't think they had radar, but we didn't want to get up where it would be usable. They also used telephonic notices that, the Japanese and the Chinese, they would notify ahead that we hear airplanes going over. It sounds like bombers, sounds like several planes and so forth. We wanted to avoid that by staying as low as you can. That makes it a lot harder for them to make those kinds of reports. We flew all two hundred and fifty miles right down on the deck and, I mean, when I say, "Down on the deck," I would say lower than the Menger hotel in San Antonio, most of the way. Some of the way, just down scraping the grass. We lost one pilot. I had a Chinese pilot, off of my left wing, who, I think, was changing his gas tank and must not have gotten it go from one tank to another and it must have flamed out with him, because he got to belly into the lake. But, we had to keep going on this mission, because it had to go. That's one of the shames of combat days. You can't risk the saving of one and then risk the loosing five hundred. It's like the Atomic bomb.

Anyway, after flying the time and the distance, which was probably, at that time, would have been about an hour and twelve to fifteen minutes, I crossed my fingers and, we were just using the clock and the compass, was all we used. I pulled up and said, "I hope that airport is down there," and there it was, right ahead of us and we went in and they had eighty-seven Japanese fighters on the field. We strafed them on the way in. We went in two ships at a time, one behind the other. We used para-frags, (?) which are little, really tiny bombs that blow fragments in all directions when you drop them. They come down on a little parachute, like a handkerchief. We strafed thee planes and the next day the people that take the photographs from the air, came over and they identified thirty-one burned planes that we got out of those eighty-seven. Two days later, we went back and hit that airport again, only this time, we dive bombed it and the Japanese vacated the base. They moved out of there. That was the heaviest defended base in the.....

Mr. Metzler: They had moved out before you got back?

Mr. Van Ausdall: No. They moved out after the second attack. We had to report around there that they were too busy burying the dead, because it must have been horrendous. As we went down that line of ships, dropping our para-frags, the Japanese pilots had just heard we were coming. That was the first they knew and they were running to their planes with their parachutes hanging on their backs and none of, hardly any of them, got there. We had one guy got on to the airport and one of our pilots shot him on his take-off run. He was the only one that got close to being airborne.

Mr. Metzler: They were real surprised.

Mr. Van Ausdall: And really lucky on our part to, I think, you know? But that was the best mission that I was on during the war.

Mr. Metzle3r: So these were, what, Zeros, most of them?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Zeros, yes. That's what that base was noted for, was being the ones that gave us all the trouble. Whenever we would be up, they would be out there trying to intercept us. They had a lot of aerial fights. We had a pilot in my unit who became an ace over there. I don't know how many, he got a lot more than five. That was a guy by the name of Phillip Coleman. (?) He is listed in those books that show you aces. John Dunning was another one of them. We had quite a few of them who got more than five. I got into several aerial fights; I only got two victories in the air. They gave me credit for a half of one because two of us shot him and neither one of us knew whether it was our bullets, so they gave us each half a credit.

Mr. Metzler: So these Zeros, which were known for being very maneuverable, fast, light. So they are, kind of, running circles around these big, old P-40's with all their armor. So what techniques did you use to equalize the playing field?

Mr. Van Ausdall: We used a cowardly technique. If we were loosing to fight, we could dive away, because they could not stay with us. But that was our salvation to come back another day. We had to, continually, use altitude, speed, we had pretty good speed even compared to them, but they had that maneuverability which we did not have. As the war went along, and all sides have to keep training people and keep replacing those they loose, their pilots got less

qualified and it got to where we were getting a lot greater percentage of victories. Part of that was because they didn't, hadn't yet learned what they could do with that lightweight plane, as opposed to our speed. But, praise the Lord for that armor plating and the heavy…The P-40 was not the greatest plane in the world, but for what they were using it for, it was about as good as it got in those days.

Mr. Metzler: So tell me about the Japanese as an adversary. What is your opinion of them, both skill wise, as a people?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Well, I was extremely impressed with their ability. I completely ignore the cultural aspects because I admire the Japanese greatly and I've lived in Japan since then and their families are like ours. They love their families, their children and, but their leadership was fouled. How they got the kind of idolatry to turn some of them into Kamikaze suicide bent people, I don't know. The thing I liked about the Chinese pilots, their humor, sense of humor, and their real good qualities. They were good pilots. We enjoyed having them with us.

Mr. Metzler: Did you get to be pretty close friends with some of the Chinese lads?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Oh, yes. Yeah. We had guys; we had one little boy by the name of Bobby Yang. Bobby's dad was a surgeon. He was such a likable fellow that everybody, in the whole group, knew him. He was one of the ones that was in my squadron. The ones at the top had not studied this much English as those on down, but the lieutenants, all the younger people, they were really got real good with the English language. A lot of them have become close and, to this day, we have these annual fighter group, Flying Tiger type, get-togethers, and these pilots, who are in the same numbered unit that we were in, my squadron was the 26th Squadron, we're meeting here in San Antonio. There are people in the 26th Squadron today that are now flying F-16s jets.

Mr. Metzler: Slightly different.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Boy, would I have loved to have had 16s. I love that airplane. We have a lot of fun with these young guys. They are twenty to twenty-seven. Some of them bring their wives with them. We have about seventeen of them with us on this particular trip. We have a gentleman out of Washington DC, whose the equivalent to air attaches, I believe, Major General Mike Kim (?) who is a super guy. We all love him. He's a great guy.

Mr. Metzler: In the passed have you had some of the Chinese pilots from World War Two era, come over for some of these reunions?

Mr. Van Ausdall: I think way back. We started the Fourteenth Air Force Flying Tigers, which was like a part of what was the CBI, part of the China-Burma-India group. Since we had our own Fourteenth, which is a little more unique than the people who were flying in India, for example. We had a special meeting that organized them. Then, General Chenault was there, was in Dayton, Ohio, I think the year was 1947. I flew out. I was in the Pentagon building at that time. I flew out there in a B-25 with a load of guys from China days and we all joined that Flying Tiger group, at that time, the Fourteenth Group....Air Force. I have been a lifetime member from that particular day.

Mr. Metzle3r: Now, when you were in China, who was your immediate commander. Who did you report to?

Mr. Van Ausdall: John A. Dunning, San Antonio, Texas. John Dunning. He was a Lieutenant Colonel when he first went over there. By the time he got out of there, he was full colonel and then he proceeded to got to the Twentieth at Shaw Field (?) South Carolina and Langley Field, Virginia and he was one of the first people to fly aerial refueling across the Atlantic with fighter planes. He went to, I think his base was Wethersfield, England and he took his F-84s, he took them over there from Langley Field with aerial refueling. He, later on, became a brigadier general and then went to the Vietnam War and was in jets and, he had back trouble, and he had to go to the Philippines for an operation on his back. He died with a complication of the anesthesiology while he was in the Philippines. Of all the people I have ever known in the world, he was my number one hero. He was really something.

Mr. Metzler: General Chenault. Now was he still around, even during the time you were there?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Oh yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. We lost track of him. So he continued to----------?

Mr. Van Ausdall: He came out to our base a lot. He came out there and we would, he was the hero of all of us to, you know? I got to see the general when he was n his waning days. I was, after the war, I was in the American Embassy in China.

I was the pilot for the Ambassador there. As he came, when he got cancer and he came through to go the Ashner (?) Clinic in Louisiana, he and his, then new wife, Anna, and I think his daughter was then twelve years old. They came through Honolulu and I was in the Pacific Air Forces at that time and my boss asked me if I, since I knew him, would I go out and meet their plane, because he couldn't 't get off the plane. He was very sick. I went to see the General and so I talked to him on the plane as he was on his way back. He only lived a few weeks after that. When he got back, then he died.

Mr. Metzler: How was communications back to family, at home, when you were out there in China?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Very difficult and very slow. We would get letters in groups. We might get nothing for three weeks and then we would get eighteen letters, or something like that, you know? It was difficult to get anything from the States because everything had to be flown in, of course, over the old Hump. I was, in those days, a cigar smoker. I wanted to get some new cigars. I finally got a box of Dutch Master cigars and another fellow, this guy Coleman (?) I told you that he was an ace; he and I both smoked cigars and we had a pact. We shook hands on it. He says, "You know, you're my boss, but I'm going to root for you, some day, to get shot down so I can get your cigars." (laughs). I said, "OK. Well, I'm the same way for you. If you get shot down, I get yours." I would go on the mission, we'd go on a big mission, get back and we'd be a little bit shaky in the cockpit and trying to get our breath and after a big mission, he'd look over at me and he would snap his fingers, as though, "Oh, you got back again." I don't get your cigars yet."

Mr. Metzler: So how was your mental outlook, going through those air battles and then coming back. I mean that must have been a real adrenaline high and then you would come back and, how long before you would go on another one?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Once a year I do a World War Two day in Chicago for two of the middle schools, Hindsdale (?) and Clarendon Hills, (?) next door. I'm telling you this for a reason. They asked me. "Boy, weren't you scared when you were over there?" We put on, about, seven, or eight, forty minute programs in one day. I'm worn out by the end of that day. They would always be asking for questions and get asked that, almost, every time, "Weren't you scared?" When I try my best to think about it, it's hard for me to remember. I was a young guy. It's hard for me to remember the war as something I was afraid of. When you are that age, it wasn't a game to us now. But, it was something that we----- the adrenaline runs and you get the job done and you really aren't running from it, you're running into it, trying to make it work.

I can't remember a day of World War Two; I had lots of times when I was afraid after the event. When I was bombed in a slit trench and it, practically burst my eardrums, right near by, I was shaking for the rest of that night.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about that. You didn't tell me about the bombing in the slit trench.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Well, I was at that base called Hunyang (?) and the Japanese would hit us. You could hear these; they were noted for not coordinating their engines very well. When you put a good pilot, puts his engines in synchronization and they all go together they almost whine, because they are making a drone. The Japanese planes would come over and they were going, "Um, um, um, um, um, you could hear them. You could tell these are Japanese planes. We were getting hit by some bombers, at this base, in the middle of the night. We all had to go outside and we ran to our slit trenches. We had those at every base we were on. We got hit on all of those bases at one time or another. They weren't always as (unintelligible) as that. This was, I think, five hundred ponders were dropped, boom, boom, boom, right down across the.....one of them hit on one side of our slit trench, oh, I say, on one side of it, forty, or fifty, feet and another one on the other side. Extremely loud and I remember thinking, "Boy, that was about as close as you're going to ever get and live through it." You know, but lots of people were saved because they were in the slit trenches. After I left that base and we were kicked out of it in a matter of two months, or so, I came back, later on, we didn't get our alert shack, (?) that we used for alerts on the airport. We didn't get it burned before we left the base. So I was running a mission to come back over there and try to set it on fire with napalm. I had a Ronson cigarette lighter that was orange, but it had gotten chipped and was looking a little old and so, I took it in and dipped it down in some paint, OD colored paint, and I put it up in the window sill of the alert shack to get dry. When we vacated the base, I forgot to go back and get my lighter. I was on the approach to set that alert shack on fire and all at once it came to me, "Oh my gosh. My lighters down there." (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: About to strafe your own lighter.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Never saw that one again.

Mr. Metzler: So tell me how the war ended for you. Describe, you know, you finally drove the Japanese out, when peace was declared. How did that work for you?

Mr. Van Ausdall: You know, some, a part of that, you will have to get from somebody who was there a little longer than I was. It got into 1945 and since I had been over there for, at that time, about two and a half years, or so. I got, I think, eighty-one missions in China. They decided they would give me the opportunity to come home to the States and go to the command and general staff school, which is at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. I came back from China by air in, like, April of '45. I can remember, almost the specific date, because, while I was there, at the staff school, while I was doing my flying at the little airbase nearby, right near Kansas City. Once a year we were supposed to be allowed to fly our wives. Very few pilots that I know of ever got to do so but this....I went in and I said, "I've never had a flight with my wife. Is that possible for me to do that?" They said, "Sure." So they gave me a C-45, which is a little five-person airplane to fly and I put my wife in the co-pilot's seat and I got in the pilot seat. I took her up for a little ride and when we came back in and landed, we pulled up to operations, in front of operations, and the GI came out to help us down, and he said, "You know that the President Roosevelt just died?" It was that day.

Mr. Metzler: That was in April.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yeah. 1945. So I stayed there until I went through that staff school, two, or three months, and then I went back to China. Now they were starting to get P-51s, the Mustang. I had not yet had my first mission in the Mustangs. I was not there for a very long period of time until my normal rotation date came along and they were going to reassign me back to US. I really didn't stay over there very long.

Mr. Metzler: Ever get to fly any P-51s?

Mr. Van Ausdall: I flew P-51s seven hundred and some hours, but not in combat. I didn't get any combat in the P-51. Oh, what a nice one that would have been. Much better plane than the P-40. I don't know, when you do these interviews, I hope you run into some people with massive amounts of either, time in either of those airplanes. I have never met another pilot who had more P-40 time than I have. But, I'm sure there are. I had, my logbook has, I think, eight hundred and forty hours in the P-40 and seven hundred and some hours in the P-51, but, I stayed in the Air Force. While I was in the Air Force, I was with the Air National Guard of Baltimore and Charleston, West Virginia and they both had P-51s. So I flew a lot of missions in the P-51.

Mr. Metzler: So you came back. You were State side then, when the war ended?

Mr. Van Ausdall: I was assigned to the Pentagon building and that was my first of two, or three, tours in the Pentagon. I was assigned to foreign training, which was, we handled, like if the Chinese came over for training, or the French, or whoever, it was up to us to coordinate their mission as and get them to the bases they were going to be trained in. Often, I would go to the graduation when these various groups would go finish their training. I was in the foreign training part of the Air Force that was in the days of both, after Hap Arnold, I think it was General Vanceburg, (?) was the Chief of the Air Force. Having stayed in for twenty-one years, in 1949, at the age of twenty-nine, the Air Force decided they wanted to have a pilot for the American Ambassador who could speak Chinese.

Mr. Metzler: You learned to speak Chinese?

Mr. Van Ausdall: They offered me the opportunity to go to college at the Air Force's expense. I said, "I can't turn it down." They said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "I want to get my college degree." They said, "What did you study?" I said, "I studied music." They said, "We're sure not going to send you to music school." Somebody used this lousy argument, he said, "Well, Chinese is a musical language. If you can't hear the rising and falling tones, you can't speak Chinese very well. How would you like to learn Chinese?" I said, "I'm game," because I had been to China. It interested me.

They sent me to Cornell University and in two and a half years, I got my degree in Chinese studies. I've studied reading, writing, spoken, even formal Chinese. I studied Chinese agriculture, Chinese philosophy, Chinese geography, people that wrote books, like Pearl Buck's brother, things like that.

I got my college degree and they immediately assigned me to be the assistant air attaché in the American Embassy in Nanking and that's where John Dunning was going to be the attaché and I was going to work for him again and I was delighted. We lived together and we couldn't take our wives with us because the Communists were shelling the town at that time. We went back and the pilots, our old pilots from the war days were stationed there and we were able to get them in and they would come to our house for movies and.....

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about that name, King (?) experience.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Well, it was, I got assigned there in February of '49 and things were getting rough. The Communists were coming down the road from the north, out of Beijing toward Nanking. We called it Nanking in those days. It seems to me like it was February that they started doing some shelling of the city of

Nanking. I remember the date very well, because it was my birthday in 1949 April 22 that we had to evacuate the base because of the enemy action. We had had our, we kept our B-17. We had the only B-17 in the world that was being used for an embassy. And here is us two fighter pilots who were the pilots for the Ambassador, John Dunning and I.

We had kept that airplane out of the city on the large airport, then, that Nanking was called Da Ja Jong. (?) We had to fly that plane down to Canton to get it out of area. The other plane, a C-47 that we had, we kept on a little airport, inside the city. Nanking city has four city walls. This was an airport inside. We kept it in there and when the Communists started shelling the town, we went down and put a plaque over the door and sealed it. Said this is an American Diplomatic aircraft, we wrote it in Chinese and in English. In between, the looters were the ones that were the main problem, because when the Nationalists troops all left that area, we, in the Diplomatic Corps, still stayed there. The American Ambassador had made up his mind that we can't run from one base to another, over here. "We're going to have talk sense to Mao Tse Tung." So we stayed there.

They took our airplane, the "in between group," this was not the Communists, but the looters. There is always looting that goes on when power leaves, just like New Orleans when the power structure leaves, they loot. They took our plane and rolled it into the hanger and they let it roll until it hit the wall and it mashed the nose in, not real bad; but they drained the gasoline out of our tanks and left the caps off and the place was full of pigeons, so you can imagine what the tops of our wings would be like in a few weeks. They stole our radio, our parachutes and all the loose equipment that was available. It was taken out, all by looters. I guess they wanted that gas just like you were in Houston in the typhoon, or, a hurricane was coming, you want gas to get out of there.

We did not even get to see that airplane from April until, sometime, in July when we got out there and found out what a mess it was in and they gave us; we had to negotiate with Mao Tse Tung's negotiators, who were then in the city, and John Dunning and I would go down and negotiate with them on what to do with this airplane. We finally said we wanted to fly it out of there. The people in Washington wanted us to fly back to see President Truman. Truman was then the President of the United States. What we found out was, we were going to have to clean those tanks out. We were going to have to get everything ready. They gave us, like, seven days, and I thought it was impossible, but all of our people, all of our crew, everybody that we could mobilize, we did a clean up job on that plane. Then we were given an opportunity to do a thirty-minute test flight, by the Communists, which we did and then we left on August 10, 1949.

We left Nanking and we flew to Okinawa, where we then met our B-17. They flew it up from the mainland and we put the Ambassador on the B-17 then and flew him back to Washington DC. We landed at, what's now, Reagan Airport and Dean Atchison was Secretary of State, he came out to

meet our plane. Our Ambassador.....I'll tell you a little side story. Our Ambassador was a seventy-three year old bachelor named Jay Layton (?) Stuart, S-T-U-A-R-T,

Mr. Metzler: This is in China?

Mr. Van Ausdall: Yes. Dr. Stuart, a wonderful guy. And he knew that my wife was home and pregnant and that I didn't have any idea how things were, because we didn't, they took our radios away from us over there. They took our staff cars away. I rented, by the month, a petty cab, with a driver. Whenever I wanted to go anywhere, he was out at the gate. We would use the petty cab, a little rickshaw, with a bicycle. Anyway, the Ambassador, as we left Honolulu, it was a fourteen-hour flight, because we didn't have much wind to help us to go to Travis, in California. Fourteen hours. Then we had to go to Washington.

The Ambassador, who was such a good natured guy and knew that my wife was in Dayton, Ohio, or near Dayton, and pregnant, he says to me, "Don't you think, if I'm going to be seeing the President, when we land over there, I better get cleaned up a little bit. Isn't there a good airbase over there, like around Dayton, or something, where we could land?" (laughs) I said, "Yeah, there's one over there," called Wright Field now. I think we might land there." He got a grin and you could see he was grinning inside and he says, "Let's land there and refuel and you can see.....I'll have lunch with the base commander and you can have your wife come out and meet us." Isn't that something?

Mr. Metzler: What a nice tough.

Mr. Van Ausdall: And they did. It was really wonderful because if I hadn't had any word from my wife from April until August. When we finally got to Okinawa we were able to get communications.

Mr. Metzler: I'll bet that's interesting, see, because that was the next, great step, over there, in the Far East. I've interviewed a lot of China Marines that were assigned there, after World War Two.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Well, our flight in an American aircraft, out of Nanking on August the 10 of 1949 was the last time an American was there in that town until the ping pong players went over and then, Nixon, in 1972, I think '72. So we were the last ones out.

Mr. Metzler: In a couple of minutes that we've left, what other stories have you chosen not to tell, that are now coming to your mind? What have you missed? I'm sure you will think of it after this thing is over .

Mr. Van Ausdall: Well, it's amazing. You sit around and you talk and one thing will lead to maybe something you....to something else.

Mr. Metzler: How did the war change you?

M. Van Ausdall: I'm sure it matured me a little bit. It took me from being a farmer to doing something a little bit more, maybe, useful in a lot of different ways. Most of my old buddies stayed on the farm and all became millionaire farmers, you know? They were paying more money for combines than our farm cost. When I was a kid, after I go my degree from Cornell, my last assignment in the Air Force was the head of the Air Force ROTC at the University of Arkansas. I was there in the days of Frank Broyals (?) was the coach and he was my golfing friend. Out at the airport, I got my first eagle, in my life, for a dime a hole, against Frank Broyles. (?) Anyway, I said, "Double for birdies, but I didn't say anything more about eagles." Here I get an eagle and I said, :Frank, you're going to owe me four of those dimes, you know?" Years later, he still wouldn't admit that he owed me any money for that eagle. I ended up, after the ROTC assignment, my wife and I decided, when we were in Arkansas, I was a member of the Rotary Club, and so was the Chamber of Commerce Manager and he said, "What are you going to do when you get out, if you do?" I said, "Well, I'd sure like what you guys are doing. You must be enjoying yourselves a lot." He says, " Let me show you how to get involved in the Chamber of Commerce career." So I went to the US Chamber of Commerce, ran various universities around the country. They sent me to Syracuse University, which was one of the six places. I looked at where there were manager jobs. They needed one in a little town in Ohio, and since that was my home state, Vanword, (?) Ohio. A city up in the Northwest corner near Fort Wayne. I became the Chamber of Commerce manager of Vanword (?) and I stayed there for five, or six, years and was hired by the US Chamber of Commerce to be the district manager in Michigan, where I had the whole state. I traveled for two , or three, years in Michigan, all over that state, visiting Chambers of Commerce and helping them with their programs and so forth. Then I was sent to the US Chamber in Chicago. In those days, here in San Antonio, you had a guy name a guy named Fred Bertner (?) who used to be the Chamber of Commerce manager here. I knew him well. He was on our board that ran these institute programs. I ran the one at Michigan State University. We had a summer

seminars of a week, or we'd bring Chamber team of managers and Association execs.

Mr. Metzler: I think they are going to shut us down. Van, I want to thank you for your time, sharing your experience with us.

Mr. Van Ausdall: I'm sure I didn't have what you were looking for.

Mr. Metzler: Well, I tell you what. You think about it over lunch. We're going to be around here this afternoon, and if we need to do another session, man, I'm all yours. I love to listen to these stories. Thank you so much.

Mr. Van Ausdall: Pleased to met you…TAPE ENDS.

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