

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Warren E. McLellan**

**Fort Smith, Arkansas**

**April 4, 2007**

**USS *Lexington* CV-16**

**Pilot, TBM Air Group 16, VT-16**

**Attacked Tarawa, Wake, Marshall Islands**

**Palau, Hollandia, Truk (very tough target)**

**Battle of Philippine Sea**

**Ditched Twice in Water**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is April 4, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. Warren E. McLellan by telephone. His phone number is area code 479-646-9245. His address is 2404 Crosshill Road, Ft. Smith, Arkansas, 72908-9177. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Warren, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. First off, what is your middle initial?

Mr. McLellan

E for Ernest.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the next thing I would like to do is to get an alternate contact. We find that sometimes two or three years down the road we try to contact a veteran and he has moved or something has happened, so is there someone that we can get in contact with in case we can't reach you at this number?

Mr. McLellan

I have three sons. The oldest is a minister at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Carrollton, Texas. His name is Carey McLellan. 3806 Cromwell Drive, Carrollton, Texas 75007. His home phone number is 972-395-3806. His number at the church is 972-242-5472. His cell phone numbers 214-789-9188.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the next thing I would like to do is to read to you this agreement with the National

Museum of the Pacific War. When I do these in person I give it to the man to read and sign, but since this is by phone let me read this to you to make sure that it is okay.

“Agreement Read.” Is that okay with you?

Mr. McLellan

That’s fine.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. McLellan

I was born on August 13, 1921.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. McLellan

I was born in Charleston, Arkansas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. McLellan

I have one brother and three sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your brother in World War II?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. He was in the Army and he was on Hokaido after the Armistice.

Mr. Misenhimer

He came home from the war then?

Mr. McLellan

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of your sisters involved in World War II in any way?

Mr. McLellan

No. One sister was married to an Air Force Lieutenant. He was in an accident and had to retire from flying so he reverted to a Master Sergeant. He died about five years ago. One sister passed away when I was in the Navy. I was just reporting to Pensacola and I came home to her funeral in January of 1942. She passed away with polio. It was quite new here at that time and I think probably the first person to die from polio in Fort Smith at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Polio was quite the thing back in those days; even up into the 1950's. Where did you go to high school?

Mr. McLellan

I went to high school in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you graduate from there?

Mr. McLellan

I graduated in 1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the Depression, how did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. McLellan

We were all poor at that time; everybody was. I remember my father working for \$15 a week at that time. He finally got a raise to \$18 a week and we thought we were in hog-heaven. I started carrying a paper route at the age of 13. Paper was worth to me 6.5 cents per week; each paper. That put me through all of high school and two years of junior college.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's work; what did he do?

Mr. McLellan

My father was shipping clerk for a wholesale grocery company, Griffin Grocery Company here in Fort Smith.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he able to keep employed during the Depression?

Mr. McLellan

Yes he was. He was employed earlier, as far back as I can remember, he was employed by the City as a Sanitary Engineer now you call it; garbage pickup. But he was a singer and taught music which he could not make a living at. He sang and wrote and taught music, shape notes, if you know what shape notes are in music. Singing at conventions was his weekend entertainment.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished high school did you go to junior college then?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. In 1939 I started junior college and finished in the summer, June of 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

What junior college was that and where was it?

Mr. McLellan

Fort Smith Junior College.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you study there?

Mr. McLellan

Just the regular first two years of general education. The one class that got me interested in aviation was taught by a man teaching civilian pilot training ground school. I finished that ground school and by that time they were offering aviation training and I flew out of a grass field across the river from downtown Fort Smith. It is right on the edge of Oklahoma. I flew a Piper Cub as my airplane to solo in. I had a lady instructor by the name of Mary Owen Campbell. My response is, "I still fly like a lady." (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you solo before you finished college there?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. I soloed and gained some hours before I went into the Navy. I went into the Navy as soon as I could after I finished two years of college. I entered the Navy as an Aviation Cadet in September of 1941. I went to a Naval Reserve Air Training Base in New Orleans on Lake Pontchartrain and was there for three months. I then got orders and qualified to go on to Pensacola.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up and ask you a couple of questions. This CPT, Civilian Pilot Training, that

was part of the military, right? It was sponsored by the government as I understand.

Mr. McLellan

It was civilian and sponsored by the government. Ground school was first here, I don't know how it was started any other place, but right after the first class of CPT Ground School we started training.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Navy to go into?

Mr. McLellan

Really I started wanting to get into what I considered to be the best service out and that was the Marines but I found out that the Marine pilots were trained by the Navy. I didn't know that at that time. So I joined the Navy and was accepted as an Aviation Cadet in the Navy. Therefore, I got my uniforms all in line and I decided I wanted a Navy uniform and that's why I stayed with the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that as far as the Marine flyers, whenever they finished and got their commission, then they could opt for the Marines if they wanted to.

Mr. McLellan

That's right, it was selective. You had a period of time there when you could select Marine or Navy. I selected the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you actually go into the Navy at when you joined up?

Mr. McLellan

At the Fort Smith recruiting station and then after that I got orders to take my physical in

New Orleans. From there, after I passed my physical, I went to the Naval Air Reserve Base in New Orleans. It was out on Lake Pontchartrain.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel down to New Orleans?

Mr. McLellan

I went by bus from Fort Smith to New Orleans. I got off in New Orleans and never had seen it. I went down there twice. I didn't pass my physical the first time. I went down there in August and then I went back in September after correcting some eye problems. I went down on the train the last time. I had to walk from the train to the hotel. I believe it was called the New Orleans Hotel down on Canal Street. Never having been there, I arrived at night and knew not where I was going or where I was walking. I remember walking that dark night through those ghetto houses, I called it, from the train station to Canal Street and the hotel I was going to. It was the New Orleans Hotel I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you went through your physical you went to this Naval Air Training Station you said was there on Lake Pontchartrain.

Mr. McLellan

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about your training there.

Mr. McLellan

I was in training for three months. It was called elimination training. From the get go you wondered whether you were going to be eliminated or not, going under that name. So we



flew the N-3-N. Most of the instructors were pilots that had come out of the Navy. They were still in the Navy but their shore duty was training pilots at the Naval Reserve Air Base in New Orleans. They were good pilots at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. McLellan

We lived in barracks. We were up every morning by 5:30 or 6:00. I'm not sure which, I know it was still dark and it was a new experience for me to live in a barracks like that. It got cold while we were there. As a matter of fact after December 7<sup>th</sup> we all had duty and we stood watch out there all night long, all day long, 24 hours a day after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you brought up December 7<sup>th</sup>; where were you when you heard about that?

Mr. McLellan

It was in the afternoon. I was sitting on my cot writing a letter home. I knew that I was in for the duration at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you originally joined, how long had you joined for?

Mr. McLellan

Originally I joined in September.

Mr. Misenhimer

For two years, or four years; how long was your enlistment for?

Mr. McLellan

I was going into the Aviation Cadet Program. I don't think there was a time limit on it. If

there was I don't remember it. After the war started I paid no attention to the time element at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes; everything was for the duration then. What is the N-3-N? Which airplane is that? Is that the Stearman?

Mr. McLellan

That is the Stearman built by Navy Aeronautical Manufacturing. It was a sturdier airplane and had a little bigger engine in it but it was on the order of a Stearman. It was a yellow plane; fabric, two wing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they also call that one the Yellow Peril? There was one plane they nicknamed the Yellow Peril but that may have been the Air Force that did that.

Mr. McLellan

It may have been but I'm not sure about that. I remember that connotation, Yellow Peril was the nickname of one of the planes and it might have been one. It would almost have to be the N-3-N.

Mr. Misenhimer

As I recall it was the only yellow airplane that they had, wasn't it?

Mr. McLellan

I don't remember another one.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got there when did you first start flying the Stearman?

Mr. McLellan

Within a week or two after reporting; I don't remember when.

Mr. Misenhimer

So almost immediately is what I am getting at. It wasn't a month or two.

Mr. McLellan

No, almost immediately. It was three months of ground school and training as I remember it, airplane training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now were you also going through other training like marching and all of that?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. We had a Marine Sergeant there that taught us everything we knew about the Navy. Things began to rush up there quite a bit about that time. They didn't waste any time on a lot of things. This Marine Sergeant was an excellent Drill Sergeant. He knew who we were and he knew who he was and he taught us how to be good naval personnel and how to be good naval stock.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your instructors, were they pretty rough on you, or how were they?

Mr. McLellan

They were not easy. They had been in situations, I don't know how much combat they had ever seen, but they had been out to the fleet and back again and that was about all we knew of them. We met them at the flight line and that was it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything in particular that you recall from your time in that school there?

Mr. McLellan

I remember one incident that I'll never forget. That was standing out and watching, I believe he was the Executive Officer of the air training there. He took this Marine Sergeant over Lake Pontchartrain and for 20 or 30 minutes tried to do outside loops with him. He never got all the way around. He only got about 3/4's of the way around on every one that he tried. The airplane wasn't powerful enough to go on through the loop. That was one of the fun experiences I had with that situation down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many were in your group that started there?

Mr. McLellan

I would say 40 or 50 maybe.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many of them finished?

Mr. McLellan

I don't know. Not all of them finished but I might relate this story about one that we thought was kicked out. I think it was planned this way. He was Cade Jaber from Fort Smith, Arkansas. He and his instructor got into a big argument one day about how to do something. Cade was already flying when we were in Fort Smith there together. We went down there at the same time but I didn't know that he was going until I saw him there. They pulled Cade out of training within the first couple of weeks. I imagine after a few pilot instructors had taken a look at him. I found out after I moved to Fort Smith in 1975 that he was pulled out and sent to multi-engine school training and he became Admiral Halsey's pilot. I didn't know that until I saw him in his front yard one day. I was driving

down the street and saw him there. He told me that then. He has passed away since then. We have a good air museum here in Fort Smith and he has a big case full of his memorabilia.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was his name?

Mr. McLellan

Cade Jaber. He has a good display in this museum here along with several other pilots from Fort Smith. It started out to be an airline museum.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened in that school?

Mr. McLellan

Everything went normal I guess until December 7<sup>th</sup>. My greatest remembrance was hearing it on the radio; the announcement that the Japanese had struck Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

And no one knew where Pearl Harbor was.

Mr. McLellan

No. I didn't know what was out there or where it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said they called that elimination school; were quite a few people eliminated there?

Mr. McLellan

Quite a few I guess. I really don't know. We didn't have that information. I was naive enough not to know about it. Just thinking that they would choose whoever they wanted to go further.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you soloed before you got down there?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. I soloed and accumulated some 70 or 80 hours, I don't know how many before I got down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a license?

Mr. McLellan

At this time, no. I haven't touched an airplane since I retired from flying on my birthday, August 13, 1981.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished the CPT, did you get a license then?

Mr. McLellan

Yes, a private pilot's license.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when you went into the Navy you already had a private pilot's license?

Mr. McLellan

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did that help you much with your training there at New Orleans?

Mr. McLellan

I think so. I think you could recognize the difference in fledglings and one that had 70 or 80 hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from your training there?

Mr. McLellan

I know standing out from midnight to 8:00 in the morning in freezing weather without proper clothing and out in the open wasn't good for my health. I was sick then for quite a bit. I reported into Pensacola and immediately they sent me to the hospital in Pensacola right after Pearl Harbor in January that is.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you stood out there because of Pearl Harbor guarding things, right?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. We wore submarine jackets I believed they called them. They did not fit very well and were not adequate for freezing weather.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there any crashes? Did anybody get hurt or killed in the training there?

Mr. McLellan

I don't remember any.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good. Now when you finished the training there you went to Pensacola, is that correct?

Mr. McLellan

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a leave to go home at that point or anything?

Mr. McLellan

I went straight to Pensacola. Reported at Pensacola in January of 1942. I got all cleared and then I started training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was considered basic or advanced or what was this?

Mr. McLellan

Primary.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you fly there?

Mr. McLellan

I started out in the SNJ. The AT-6 is the Army designation of the SNJ. We did formation flying with that; bombing with that. We did gunnery with that airplane. I believe that was about all the training that we did at that time. We started formation flying and bombing and gunnery and stuff like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go straight from the N-3-N to the SNJ?

Mr. McLellan

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

No other plane in between?

Mr. McLellan

No. I think that was the sequence.



Mr. Misenhimer

How as the SNJ to fly as compared to the N-3-N?

Mr. McLellan

It was a good airplane to fly. At that time it had more than just a set of instruments and a stick and pedals to fly. It had hydraulics and landing gear retraction and so forth.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was an all metal low wing plane too, wasn't it?

Mr. McLellan

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was a lot more airplane than the N-3-N.

Mr. McLellan

Oh yes. It required more training.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that training there?

Mr. McLellan

Another thing that we did in that training was instrument work, so that was another month of flying. I think it was around 5 or 6 months of flying.

Mr. Misenhimer

So it was probably July or so when you finished up there?

Mr. McLellan

About July of 1942 to finish. Then we went to Miami, Opalaka in Miami.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there?

Mr. McLellan

That was called Advanced Training. We flew some SNJ's there in gunnery. We had to qualify in gunnery there by shooting at sleeves pulled behind other airplanes. We did bombing there and navigation. Then we were selected I guess about that time from our gunnery scores whether we would be in fighter planes or bombing planes. I missed fighter squadron by one bullet. My mark needed one more bullet to make fighter pilot, which I wanted at that time. Then I got orders to torpedo planes after that training in Miami. I went to Fort Lauderdale for that. I was in the first group of 24 pilots that trained at Fort Lauderdale. It was good duty but it only lasted a month. It was duty to teach us how to drop torpedoes. We dropped concrete torpedoes at a sled being pulled by a boat out in the ocean. We were only there for one month and then went to carrier qualification in Glenview, Illinois.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me backup and ask you a few questions. About when did you go to Fort Lauderdale?

Mr. McLellan

It was probably in the month of August.

Mr. Misenhimer

So how long were you in Miami then?

Mr. McLellan

I think I was in Miami for two or three months.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you got there in July, right?

Mr. McLellan

About that, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

So it was probably October when you went to Fort Lauderdale?

Mr. McLellan

Yes probably, that's about right because it was about three months total down in that area.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were doing this torpedo training, what kind of plane were you in then?

Mr. McLellan

TBM.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you went straight from the SNJ to the TBM?

Mr. McLellan

No. We got the bi-plane, the SBC. It was a dive bomber, was a bi-plane with two wings.

Mr. Misenhimer

You trained on that where, at Miami?

Mr. McLellan

At Miami.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not familiar with that plane.

Mr. McLellan

I think it was a bi-plane and it had rag covering on it, cloth and metal. Maybe the controls were metal. I'm not sure now, it's been so long. The thing that I remembered about that was that it was such a good airplane to fly except it took 54 cranks to get the gear up and 45 cranks to get the gear down and it had big oleo struts on it; long oleo struts. It was a smooth airplane to fly and to land. It was a good airplane but it was a cloth covered airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of training did you do in it?

Mr. McLellan

Glide bombing. I never did any dive bombing. Glide bombing is up to 60 degrees. Dive bombing is from about 60 to 90 degrees.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up. When you were doing this gunnery training you were firing at sleeves being pulled by another airplane, right?

Mr. McLellan

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there several of you shooting at the same sleeve or just one plane?

Mr. McLellan

One plane at a time. They way they marked it, they kept a record of the color of the paint that they put on bullets that was in that airplane. I remember I was flying an SNJ with red nosed bullets on it. Nothing dry but it stays with the bullet and as it goes through the

sleeve it leaves a round red hole in the sleeve. It was a 30 caliber.

Mr. Misenhimer

That way they could tell who hit the sleeve then?

Mr. McLellan

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever shoot at any ground targets or just at the sleeve?

Mr. McLellan

Just at the sleeve.

Mr. Misenhimer

At Fort Lauderdale you did the torpedo bombing in the TBM you said? How was it to switch to that airplane? It's an awfully big airplane.

Mr. McLellan

The SBC was a pretty good sized airplane in my estimation. It was a pretty big one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of the four, the F4-F, the Wildcat and the SBD which was a dive bomber and the TBM, I thought it was at least 50% bigger than the others and maybe almost twice the size.

Mr. McLellan

I imagine the weight they could haul, it seems to me like the TBM would gross out about 16,000 pounds.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, it was way up there. Tell me about your training there; dropping these concrete torpedoes.

Mr. McLellan

You never knew the result, it was just whether you were near the target where the torpedo would hit. I think it was scored. I don't remember much about the scoring of it. It was the experience of flying the airplane with that load; dropping that load and getting into position to drop that load. Supposedly hitting the target, it is a moving target, so you have to lead it and that's about the only scoring that you can do because a concrete torpedo weighing about 2,000 pounds would sink pretty fast.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's what I was about to say. That torpedo wouldn't go very far through the water I wouldn't think.

Mr. McLellan

No. You could probably just see the splash and the wake as the torpedo sank and that's about all.

Mr. Misenhimer

It didn't have any kind of propulsion on it, did it?

Mr. McLellan

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was just a great big rock. (laugh)

Mr. McLellan

That's right; a rock shaped like a torpedo.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from that training that you recall?

Mr. McLellan

No. That was only a month of training there at Fort Lauderdale. I recall that it was good duty because I was in the first 24 that got there. There were no living quarters on the base at that time. They had just taken over the airport there and started this training. We lived near the beach and would go to the beach in the mornings or we would rotate. The program was like this, you would go out in the morning on the beach and get your exercise and then you would come in at noon and go to the airfield and fly the airplanes in the afternoon. The next week you would rotate and do it the opposite way. You would go to the field first and fly in the morning and then go take your exercise on the beach in the afternoon. We lived in little hotels that the Navy rented. I would like to do that today.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the TBM had the hydraulic to raise and lower the landing gear, right?

Mr. McLellan

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't have to crank them up and down anymore.

Mr. McLellan

No; that was a thing of the past.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many crewmen on a TBM?

Mr. McLellan

There were two others; a pilot, a radioman and a gunner.

*(tape side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, you said your first gunner was who?

Mr. McLellan

My first gunner was Jimmy Rehen. I was looking for his first name. I had two while I was out there. Rehen transferred out. He was a regular Navy man. My radioman was a Reserve and never the twain shall meet.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you Reserve or were you regular navy?

Mr. McLellan

I was Reserve, USNR. My radioman was Shelby Greenhalgh. He stuck with me the whole time we were out there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you picked him up at Fort Lauderdale and he stuck with you the whole time?

Mr. McLellan

No, you didn't get assigned your crew until you got to the squadron. That didn't happen until January of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were doing your training there at Fort Lauderdale, dropping these concrete torpedoes, did you have two other people in the plane with you?

Mr. McLellan

No. I don't think so. Not unless somebody wanted to go for a ride.

Mr. Misenhimer

There was really no need for them to be there at that point?



Mr. McLellan

No need for them to be there.

Mr. Misenhimer

As I recall the TBM could carry either four 500 pound bombs or one 2000 pound torpedo.

Mr. McLellan

Or one 2000 pound bomb or one 1000 pound bomb or 12 100 pound bombs or 12 incendiary bombs. It was a very versatile airplane. In ASW work you also carried sonar buoys in there for marking, for tracking a submarine in the water. The TBM was built by Grumman aircraft on Long Island. The TBM-1. Then the TBM was built by General Motors who finished it up while Grumman started work on the F6F to replace the F4F.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there much difference between a TBM and a TBM?

Mr. McLellan

No difference as far as I knew.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else at Fort Lauderdale that you recall?

Mr. McLellan

That's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go from there?

Mr. McLellan

From Fort Lauderdale I went to Glenview for carrier qualifications.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go there?

Mr. McLellan

That would have been about December of 1942. I know that it was cold. I was so cold during the latter part of that month that the *Wolverine*, which was a confiscated large side-wheeler pleasure yacht. They put a flight deck on it. Lake Mission began to freeze up. They had to keep those paddles turning at night to keep the paddles from freezing in the ice so they could operate the next day. It got so cold that they could not keep that going all the time. We finally had to bundle up and take the airplanes and go to Norfolk, Virginia to check out on the USS *Charger*.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you do any carrier landings on the *Wolverine*?

Mr. McLellan

No. Our group went out one day. There was ice all over everything in the water. The reason that we finally bundled everything up and went to Norfolk is because this airplane had engine trouble and they sent him back to Glenview but he never arrived back at Glenview. We never knew what happened to him. That in itself is the first death that I remember in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

So he probably went into Lake Michigan if they couldn't find him?

Mr. McLellan

He probably did. That is what the assumption was. We flew over the lake the next day looking for him or looking for any evidence of him. They wanted to know what happened

to him, but they never found him.

Mr. Misenhimer

The lake wasn't frozen solid all over, then?

Mr. McLellan

I don't believe it was. As I remember it looked more like chunks of ice but I think it will freeze solid. It was 25 degrees below 0 and we had to walk from the hangar to the BOQ and we had to wear our heavy flight suits; those big bomber jackets and flight suits that they wore at high altitudes, for high altitude bombing, and we still got cold. You couldn't take a deep breath in that air up there; it was so cold, we weren't used to it. It wasn't like Florida.

Mr. Misenhimer

So what all did you do at Glenview, anything at all?

Mr. McLellan

We went to the hangar every day and waited for your number to come up on the board to go qualify. Then it got so cold and all of this happened that I never got to qualify on the *Wolverine*.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly your plane up there some?

Mr. McLellan

Yes I believe we did. I never went out to the carrier however to circle around that. I don't remember doing any of that. But I do know that on the search, I guess I flew on the search looking for the pilot that was downed but I really don't remember the details of it very much.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you arrive in Norfolk?

Mr. McLellan

It would have been in January of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do down in Norfolk?

Mr. McLellan

The first thing we did was to load up two pilots in the back end of a TBM and head for Chesapeake Bay to do some landings on the USS *Charger* which was a converted small carrier. It was so foggy that the pilot flying the airplane had to land in a wheat field or something out there. We didn't go that day to fly out there; it was too foggy. We did individually get in airplanes and fly from the Naval Air Station at Norfolk to the *Charger* and do our qualifications out there.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many landings did it take to qualify?

Mr. McLellan

It seems to me like it was four.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like the first time you made a carrier landing?

Mr. McLellan

The first time I landed on a carrier I remember the signal officer meeting with us before we got in our airplanes to go. He said, "When I give you the cut, you go for the deck." Well when I got the cut I went for the deck and I hit it too hard and burst a tire. They

took the plane down into the hangar deck, changed the tire and put me back in the airplane and then he said, "Now the next time, make a normal landing; don't just go for the deck." (laugh) I never will forget that. After that I never had any more trouble. I made 168 or 170 landings on a carrier I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a lot of them. What else did you do there in Norfolk?

Mr. McLellan

I believe I delayed en route in reporting to my air group, VT-16. I believe I was delayed maybe 30 days, I'm not sure. I went home on leave for a while. Mother was smart enough to have a party for me. There were only women around there and there were about 6 or 8 girls there at the party. That's where Wanda and I began to get interested in each other even though we knew each other in school. We both were in Junior College together. Then I reported to Air Group 16, VT-16, Torpedo Squadron 16 at Quonset Point, Rhode Island. It was the coldest day I ever saw. I never will forget getting there just at dark and walking up the BOQ steps and looking for warm air someplace.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you arrive there?

Mr. McLellan

It was in January of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you weren't at Norfolk very long then?

Mr. McLellan

No; only a month or less. I was there for two weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

So it was January - February when you got to the Air Group at Quonset Point.

Mr. McLellan

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alright. You were called Air Group 16 and also VT-16, is that right?

Mr. McLellan

The whole Air Group was formed at Quonset Point. The fighter squadron had F4-F's. The Dive Bombing Group 16 had SBD's. The Torpedo Squadron 16 had TBM's. My log books are out in that museum out here at Fort Smith.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay and then what happened?

Mr. McLellan

We flew and we had flight school sessions until about June. About June of 1943 the new *Lexington* was launched. We went aboard the *Lexington* to go to Trinidad to the Gulf of Peria for a month's training and the shakedown of the aircraft carrier. We had lots of flying to do there. Back at Quonset Point we did long searches, we did bombing, both miniature and big bombs occasionally and then torpedo drops. There weren't many torpedo drops that I can recall now but mostly our plan was to devise an attack on a carrier, on an enemy ship. We would take two groups of planes, four each, which would make eight airplanes and we would space those airplanes so that eight airplanes would meet simultaneously over around the bow of an enemy ship and our deal was to release all at one time. There was no place for the ship to go with those eight torpedoes in the

water at the same time. We practiced that a lot. Then we practiced field carrier landings. We did a lot of practice field carrier landings to go aboard the carrier. We did go aboard on that shake down cruise, whenever the *Lexington* was ready for shakedown. That's all we did up there. The TBM had a Norden bombsight for high level bombing. We devised a system where in the hangar, they had half a hangar that we used as a practice place and it was sort of like a bunch of scaffolding welded together that was driven by electric motors. We ran this Norden bombsight contraption direct to the spot for releasing bombs by a mark on the floor that we targeted, that we were aiming for. We could crank in wind, drift and altitude; that all makes a difference. That way we could practice using the Norden bombsight. You had to turn the Norden bombsight control over to the automatic pilot so to speak. It was a bunch of gyros that took control of the airplane so the Bomb Sight operator could direct the airplane to the target. You just sat up there and watched it. We never used that. It was a lot of expense that we went to that we really didn't need.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened next?

Mr. McLellan

We went aboard the *Lexington* carrier and made a run to the Gulf of Peria to Trinidad. At that time we were told that we could not fly over Venezuela. We couldn't fly over that at the time because of problems in Venezuela. We spent time running searches out in the Atlantic. Anti-submarine work. We would go on long searches carrying bombs. Navigation. Then we went through the Windward Pass down there at night. Carriers had to get up to top speed to run on up there. It seems like we went through the Windward Pass at about 33 knots, going all night long. That was pretty fast for a big ship like that.

We wanted to avoid night operations with submarines around. Submarines couldn't handle ships going that fast very well.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your submarine searches did you ever find any submarines?

Mr. McLellan

No, never saw a one. I did learn a lesson on navigation though. The Agonic Line passes down that direction. That's a magnetic variation. We navigated at Quonset Point where the variation was 20 degrees. I've forgotten whether that was plus or minus. Then after you pass the Agonic Line, the variation changes and gets up to around 20 degrees down in that area. By the time you are down around the Jacksonville area. I was out on a search; 150 miles south and 50 miles cross-leg. On cross-leg all I could check was navigation. I discovered that I had used a variation from Quonset Point instead of the variation for the Jacksonville area where we were. That put me off course 40 degrees. I discovered that on the cross-leg. You fly the cross-leg to get up to where you can join the return leg back to the ship. I had to find where that 40 degree mistake had put me. So I had to refigure my whole navigation. So I got the smoke light and circled that smoke light for about five minutes while I figured out where that 40 degree mistake had put me. I figured out that it had put me right ahead of the carrier; 100 miles ahead of the carrier. So all I did was turn down the direction and reverse course back to the carrier path, which the carrier doesn't really follow. That's a fictitious ship type thing where the fictitious ship travels on the course but not the carrier. It does its zig zagging and all of that. I had to make up my mind whether I was going to fly to Jacksonville because of my fuel or to save face, try to find the carrier. So I saved face and turned on the carrier and headed 100



miles towards them. That was good and nobody ever said anything about it. I know I was radar tracked but nobody ever called. You didn't break radio silence for anything like that and nothing was ever said about it. That's about all of that. That's where I learned to navigate.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was quite an experience. If you hadn't caught it, you sure could have wound up in trouble.

Mr. McLellan

That's right. I would have been one of the victims of the Bermuda Triangle. I don't know whether that is fictitious or not. It has cost the pilots.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. McLellan

Then we went on to the Gulf of Peria and did our training down there. We crashed a few airplanes and especially the fighter pilots. Evidently they didn't like the F4F. It was under powered. It had to be held in position because of the crosswinds. If the carrier turned crosswise the wind would really unlevel the airplane. They had to hold it in position a lot. Then we came back to the Quonset Point area. We came back to Quonset Point off the carrier. The ship went on to the Boston Navy Yard. They worked out its problems. That took another couple of months I guess. Then we went back aboard the carrier and started out for Panama to go through the Canal at Panama. We developed a fuel tank leak on the carrier; with all that gasoline. We had to pull into Norfolk and they took about a month to fix that up. They gave us a couple of weeks leave. I went home

and back to Norfolk in two weeks. We went on down to the Panama Canal and went through the Canal. We got to Pearl Harbor in September of 1943. We conducted maneuvers all the way over. Carrier landings and attacks. We practiced attacks on our ships to develop our torpedo attacks and so forth. We got orders to, before we pulled into Pearl Harbor, to sneak into there and to check the defenses of Pearl Harbor. We were coming up from the Panama Canal area and they wanted us to practice and see if we could get into Pearl Harbor before the Air Force got us; and we did. We beat them into Pearl Harbor

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this the planes or the ship?

Mr. McLellan

The airplanes to attack Pearl Harbor just like they did in December. We went in and had an accident there though. I lost my roommate, his name was Thompson. We were told to go up to 300 feet. We were all flying right above the ocean to stay under the radar. We went up to 300 feet. We were to pick a target and act like we were going to bomb it. When we got up to 300 feet and picked our target, everybody tried to pick the same target and that put a number of airplanes on the same target. Not all of them because we were not all together but one part was. Thompson came up underneath another airplane and he got his airplane chopped up and he crashed into the shop area of Pearl Harbor at the Navy Base there. There was a big mess over that. I heard the prop of another airplane that got too close to me. I just heard it in time to push my airplane down faster than he was coming down. That was not easy to do when you are right underneath an airplane until you can glide out from underneath that other airplane. That was a mistake. We landed on

Ford Island. There were still ships there. I believe that the *Oklahoma* was still laying over on its side. I actually walked out on the side of that ship, laying in the water. Then the next day or so, our fighter group went into standby, not to attack but to standby to help if need be for attacks on Wake Island. The rest of the group, the bombers and the torpedo planes, did not go on that. Then on September 18, 1943 we attacked Tarawa and went down there and made about three attacks on Tarawa. We took off at 3:30 in the morning. We hit them at daylight. When we manned our airplanes we were told that there were airplanes over the target at the present time but they didn't know who they were. The Army airplanes were supposed to leave there before midnight. When we got there just before daylight they were still sitting at the gun emplacements and they shot at the first airplane to dive bomb Tarawa. I pulled out of my first dive when I saw that and came around to the other side and came in and they were sitting over there ready to shoot. I even got hit on that one. It knocked some dust off of the armor plating under the pilot's seat. I finished my attack and went back to the carrier. We made about three strikes on Tarawa.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which island chain is Tarawa in?

Mr. McLellan

The Gilberts. Then we went back the next month. But first we went to Wake Island as a group and attacked Wake Island on October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. I'm reading now from my information. We attacked Wake Island and then went back to Pearl Harbor. Then they put the troops ashore at Tarawa from the 19<sup>th</sup> through the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, 1943. Our group was used an interceptor group from the Marshall Islands. One day up there we caught a

group of airplanes flying toward the Gilbert Islands. Our fighter pilots shot all but two or three out of the air. There were about 25 airplanes in that group. They shot all of them down except two or three that got away. Then we attacked islands on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of December. We attacked really mostly in the Marshall Islands on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of December, 1943. We attacked Kwajalein on the way back from the attacks made the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of December. It was on the way back to Pearl Harbor that we got a message that there was a cruiser at Kwajalein atoll and we were to separate from the task force and go back and sink that cruiser. We did that and my torpedo camera picture is in this magazine called "Carrier War", it's a picture of a cruiser with a fire on the fantail which was an airplane burning on the catapult. We made our torpedo attack on that cruiser. In analyzing my torpedo camera picture, at the time of release I was 600 yards and 250 feet off the water. I told my gunners, both the radioman and the turret gunner had guns, I told them to put their guns out the starboard side and that we would be turning right down over the bow of that cruiser and they could rake that cruiser with their machine gun fire. I couldn't shoot at it because when you're on a torpedo attack you are out in front of the cruiser so to speak, so you couldn't shoot at it and get into position to do all that I wanted to do. So I turned and went right down the side of that ship. Right over the bow; right down the side of the ship. After they got through firing and after I got by the cruiser, I pulled off and went up and joined back with my group. I lost my wingman at Mille on March 18, 1944. Mille is in the Marshall group of islands. We went in to attack and there was a big thunderstorm over the island. We had 120 airplanes and we turned away from the thunderstorm and he kind of got in the edge of the thunderstorm. I sort of slipped under the group because they turned right towards me and I was on the outside of the

group, on the inside of the turn. The inside of the turn doesn't fly as fast as the planes on the outside of the turn. We were flying at stall speed, as a matter of fact, just above stall speed. We sort of got into a lot of clouds right before we got turned around. I never saw my wingman again, I don't know. I guess he spun in there. I was about to spin in there. I never saw him again. Then on the 29<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> of March we attacked the Palau Islands. On one of my trips there I got shot in the engine but was able to get that airplane almost halfway back to the ship. I had a wingman to cross under me to see what kind of damage was going on. It looked like things were going to get worse. He said, "You're about to catch on fire, it looks to me like. You had better set it down while you can." So I turned around into the wind and sat it down. We got out and that's when Ira Zautner, who was the backseat man in the SOC; they landed and took a picture. I have the picture. There were two SOC's out there. If I can clear this up a little bit. There were two SOC's out there and a submarine. They were all on rescue missions for the U.S. The airplane landed and picked me up and they got my crew picked up. The other guy stayed in the air until the first airplane was out of the water and he took pictures. I have a picture of my airplane still afloat. An airplane landing to pick me up and a rescue submarine in the upper right hand corner of that picture. So I had plenty of help getting rescued. I barely got to swim a little bit in the ocean because that airplane picked me up and I was back in the air in 5 or 10 minutes, or 15 or 20, I don't know how many, but it was a good and fast rescue. They took me to their cruiser which was the USS *Wichita* which was the star for the cruiser division. *(Tape side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, you were picked up and when did you get back to your ship?

Mr. McLellan

I got back a week later at Pearl Harbor. They didn't transfer me like they did during the first Battle of the Philippine Seas. I got back when we got back to Pearl Harbor. My crewman got back at the same time. I walked off of the *Wichita* and went to the *Lexington*. That's the way I got back to the *Lexington*.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was in March of 1944. When you all landed in the water, were you able to get your life rafts out?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. We got the dinghy out, the big one. We had our individual life rafts still with us. They were attached to our parachutes.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you were in the dinghy?

Mr. McLellan

We paddled over to the other airplane in our dinghy and got aboard the SOC. I had to sit on Zautner's lap until we got back to the cruiser. That was the first time I had seen the landing and the operation of a seaplane from a cruiser and how they do it. It was very unique and a wonderful way to do it. They had to fly right into the ship practically to set it down on the water to taxi up on a sled and they pull you up where you can get a crane out there and hook the crane to the airplane and lift you out. I've got a picture of that being done.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that the cruiser makes a turn to kind of smooth the water out to land on, is

that right?

Mr. McLellan

They make a shallow turn to smooth the water and you land in that smooth water; which is not smooth. It is a little bit turbulent but it is smoother than landing out on the open sea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did two of your crew come back on that plane, or just you?

Mr. McLellan

Just me on one plane and they had one other. They had two airplanes. I don't remember whether the cruiser brought two airplanes or one airplane. I have always supposed that it was two airplanes from the same cruiser, but I'm not sure about that. I think they have two catapults and they set one on one and one on the other one.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you and your crew get back together again?

Mr. McLellan

We got back together, I think we were both on the *Wichita* together. They were in the crew department and I was in officer's quarters. I can't remember seeing them during that time. The ship was so crowded with all of the flag officers aboard and their crews too. I had no place to sleep. I got a mattress from someplace; the pilots scrounged up a mattress for me and I slept out on the deck until it rained one night. Then I took it down to their room and threw it right on the floor and slept on that the rest of the night. On the deck rather; I've forgotten my Navy lingo.

Mr. Misenhimer

One of your crew came back on the submarine, is that right?

Mr. McLellan

No. They were in the other SOC. The other SOC did not have a backseat man, I don't believe. But the one that I got on had a backseat man, which was Zautner. The only place that I could sit was on his lap. He called me here on day and he said, "Do you remember riding on somebody knees to get back to the ship?" I said, "I sure do." And he said, "Well, I'm the guy."

Mr. Misenhimer

When you all got back on the *Lexington* you got your crew back together then, right?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. We got back together on the *Lexington*.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. McLellan

I didn't get to go on Woelde Island. Then the attack on Hollandia, New Guinea was on April 27, 1944. It seems like that was the next one. Hollandia, New Guinea, maybe a couple of attacks down there at least. The next one was Truk Island on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 1944. That was a rough one, Truk was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me all about that.

Mr. McLellan

I think I made three attacks on Truk. That's when an OS-2U landed in the lagoon at Truk



and picked up so many people that they could not take off with them. They hung to the airplane wherever they could sit or hold on to until they got out to sea, or to get some help where they could get those pilots out. By the time Truk was over I had about ten raids I think and my story is that on the first ten raids that I made, my airplane was hit with gunfire on six of them. I was trying to get down in and be sure to make a contact, do the right thing. It says it was two days here, the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, and we had great success. Our air group, every place they went, they had good success, especially the fighter pilots. Fighter pilots we had, our first Ace I think was Alex Bracio of Chicago. I think he eventually had over 20 airplanes to his credit. Finally after our air group was relieved, Mitscher finally put Bracio; held him out of the air for a while. He said, "You're going to get killed one of these days." I've got a lot to say about Mitscher. He was an aviator from his first day of work. He was a great Admiral. Mitscher was on the NC-1, 2, 3 and 4. He was on one of those airplanes that flew across the Atlantic in 1923 or 1924 or something like that. I'm not sure. He didn't get to finish the flight. He was rescued. So he was aware of what happens to aviators after their airplane no longer flies. I credit my life to Admiral Mitscher because in the first Battle of the Philippine Sea he let rescue airplanes fly over 300 miles to pick me and my crew up and they also picked up the crew of another torpedo bomber. Not the pilot, but the crew. There were five of us picked up out there, who had landed, practically in the middle of the Japanese fleet. Therefore I have high acclaim for Admiral Mitscher. He was a pilot. He knew what pilots went through. In retrospect there was another Admiral that went out there and they gave him seven hours of flight time and pinned a pair of wings on him. We had a friend of mine, Paul Bunilla, who was a crewman that got shot down at Midway Island. This Admiral would not send rescue

planes off to get him out of the water. They knew where he was. Our bombing Executive Officer at that time I believe, but he became Commanding Officer of Bombing 16, kept circling him in the air. Protecting him until the rescue planes could get there. Finally the Admiral decided that after all the guff that he was getting that he would send the rescue airplanes off and that rescue plane got lost and had to break radio silence to get him back. Then a week later, or four or five days later, he was rescued by a submarine. That is about all of the story that I know about that. Admiral Mitscher watched the airplanes. Admiral Mitscher even flew with Cook Cleland in a dive bomber to Hollandia. I think the story goes that Cook Cleland flew down right, and may have touched down on the airfield on Hollandia with Admiral Mitscher aboard and then brought him back to the carrier. He was just an aviator all the way around. Both were good aviators. Cook Cleland later won the Bendix Air Race in 1947 with an F4U, sawed-off wingtips and so forth. Now he's lost one leg with lack of circulation. When we were at a reunion in Washington for the dedication of the World War II Memorial, Cook Cleland was in his wheel chair, trying to stand up. It was impressive. Two guys, one on each side, got him up and stood him up while the flags were going by. I thought that showed respect.

Mr. Misenhimer

It does. I understand that Mitscher did something else that saved a bunch of pilots too, is that right?

Mr. McLellan

He saved every one that he could that he knew was down in the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

The one I'm talking about is at the Battle of the Philippine Seas. You meant on the water

but these were coming back after dark and he told the ships, "Turn on all of your lights so those pilots can find us."

Mr. McLellan

He sure did. I didn't fly back on that one because I was in the water. Mitscher decided that it was about time for them to be in range where they could see and the weather wasn't all that good. He said, "Turn the spotlights into the air." We lost a bunch of airplanes that night because we ran out of gas. In the first Battle of the Philippine Sea I had gone 350 miles when I quit navigating and I had already switched off of my center main gas tank and that held half of my gasoline. We still had not made our attack. We went on to another group. We bypassed a group that was being attacked. I watched the bombs hit that big carrier out there. The *Shokaku* I think it was, or something like that. We went on and we were going to the other group. There were only four or five airplanes in the air. They slipped up from underneath the clouds, the thunderstorm that we passed by and they came up underneath and our low cover started chasing them. One of the Japanese planes got around and came right up underneath me. I was on the outside and I didn't even know he was there until I saw the bullets pass through the airplane and out in front. His machine guns fired. All of that happened at the same time, or about the same time. I felt the hydraulics burst in my cockpit. Flames came up through the fill pipe that the gasoline goes to the center main gas tank. The center main gas tank blew up really, is what happened. Fire was in the cockpit. I got scorched by the fire on my left arm. Then I couldn't warn my crewman. I couldn't yell loud enough to get them to hear or anything like that. They saw me go over the side and they got out right behind me. I saw both of them in their parachutes on the way down. Thank God for that. By the time I got in the

water, it was dark on the water. I saw a carrier go by with about a 15 degree list on it. I saw five Zero type airplanes flying through the air like they were trying to get a place to land. I don't know whether they ever got aboard a carrier or not. That was the only airplanes I saw out there that night. The Marianas Turkey Shoot, the record that I have says that there were 402 Japanese airplanes shot down out of the air the day before the first Battle of the Philippine Sea. It was called the Marianas Turkey Shoot where we caught the airplanes coming in on radar at 130 miles and intercepted them at 60 miles and the fight started. They shot down what they could there and then they were coming in over our fleet. They were going to send them on to Guam to refuel. All we did was send a Combat Air Patrol over Guam and when they came in, they would shoot them down there. They would shoot them down in the air, on the runway, on the rollout or wherever they could find them. Before the day was done 402 were without airplanes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you've got me a little confused here Warren. When you bailed out, was this before you went in the water when Zautner picked you up, or was this after?

Mr. McLellan

Before.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were in the water three different times?

Mr. McLellan

No twice. Palau and the first Battle of the Philippine Sea. I bailed out. Saw my airplane crash on the water. Saw the Zero strafe that airplane who had followed the airplane down. He evidently didn't see us in our parachutes and strafed my airplane after it hit the

water and this was at night. I was there in the water thinking, "Here I am in the water; now what do I do?" I looked around and here was a Japanese cruiser coming my direction. I guess it was a cruiser. All I could see was his broad beam coming right at me. I was trying to figure out which direction to swim, left or right. All of a sudden he turned and went to my left. He was headed for that airplane which was at one time burning on the water. He got so close to me that even in the early night, the sun had been set for some time, I could see the color of the uniforms on deck, especially the white uniforms. I could tell that they were olive drab uniforms on deck. So they had two different kinds of uniforms. I could see that. I watched the carrier go by with an approximate 15 degree list. I saw the airplanes go by. I saw bombs hit the other big carrier. The gunfire from the Japanese ships was of all colors, black, white, red, blue, green. So they could tell where their shells were bursting. Then I stayed there all night long. About midnight I decided that with all of my survival kit wet and soaking in water and full of water that it was too heavy to mess with any longer. So I turned it loose. I got out of my parachute. As I came down into the water to begin with, the parachute sank and acted like a sea anchor and pulled me under the waves. The wave would come by and go over my head instead of me floating on top of the wave. So I had to get rid of my parachute as quickly as I could, which was difficult because the harness was all wet. Because of that they redesigned the snaps where now you just snap them loose instead of the D-ring that you have to have a little slack in order to get out of the harness. They redesigned that. I floated there, getting sick during the night, drinking the sea water that I drank while getting out of my parachute. Trying to rest in my Mae West, with half of my Mae West open, the other half wasn't. It didn't have any air in it, I guess there was a hole in it somewhere. I got sick. I

lost my cookies a few times. I lost some pounds that night. I felt like I lost about 15 pounds that night. The next morning, about 10:00 airplanes came by, out of my own squadron by the way, I recognized the pilots as they went by. They dropped life boats to us. We never got together in the water even though we were fairly close together. But however long it takes one to get out of an airplane and another one and another one, so we never got together that night. I even fired a flare off one time to try and get us together in hopes that somebody would have a life boat. I finally kicked my boots off after midnight sometime. They were water soaked and heavy and pulling me under. I threw away my D-ring from my parachute ripcord because it was hitting me on the shin and causing my shin to hurt. I knew I wouldn't need my boots any longer. I swam there until 10:00 the next morning. This was started at 7:00 at night I'll say, I don't know what time it was. We left at 3:30 and after about three hours of flying time, so that would be about 6:30 so it would be about 7:00 or so. Then from 7:00 to 10:00 is fifteen hours. So my squadron came by and dropped us lifeboats. I didn't get the first one, but I got the second one. Then they went on back to the ship. I crawled into the lifeboat and covered up with a sail and went to asleep. I was awakened by an F6-F buzzing my lifeboat. I uncovered and started waving like mad. Then here came the float planes, OS-2U's that picked us up. They picked me up and I saw my two crewman after we joined up to go back to the fleet; I saw my two crewmen in the other airplane next to me, so I knew they were alright and there were two crewmen out of another torpedo bomber in the other airplane. There were three airplanes that I knew of out there and there might have been four or five float planes there. Admiral Mitscher was looking for people who were down in the water. We had 90 planes down in the water that night even though he turned on the

lights. Mitscher saved about all of them except for 42 people, I'm guessing, but I think it was 42 people that were missing after that. From 90 planes, he lost only a third of the planes that were in the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was remarkable.

Mr. McLellan

Yes, a real effort. There were crashes on the flight decks that held us up. One plane came in without a signal officer, actually he was trying to wave him off, but he came in and landed on the *Lexington*. He drove one or two airplanes down the forward elevator along with a bunch of people that were around them. A bunch of them were killed on the elevator that night from that mess-up. He started landing airplanes as soon as he could. I don't know if they got any aboard that night or not but I imagine they did. I got back to whatever cruiser it was; I don't know what cruiser it was, I wasn't on there long enough to even get acquainted with anybody. A destroyer pulled up alongside. Admiral Mitscher had sent that destroyer for me and I guess he sent a destroyer for the other crew members too. They were on other ships as far as I know. I was passed over by a Breech<sup>5</sup> Buoy to the *Lexington*. As I got on the *Lexington* I heard over the loudspeaker for McLellan to report to Admiral Mitscher. I did. I went up and talked to Admiral Mitscher for just a few minutes. He was the sober thinking type and he said, "Well, I think we got two carriers that night." I understand that night in the water for five hours after the battle was over, I kept feeling concussions in the water. The only thing, there was nobody flying that I knew of at that point, and there were no bombs being dropped that I knew of. I kept feeling concussions in the water. I feel like and tried to verify it with those that would

know, that those carriers that we hit out there that night, the two that were sunk, were sinking in the water and as they sunk, the water pressure got so, they had 30,000 foot deep water out there, the Marianas Trench, compartments in those ships were collapsing. That's all I could figure. Nobody would tell me otherwise so that's my story, and I'm sticking to it. (laugh) Admiral Mitscher, I can't say enough for. He managed his staff well. His flagship was on the *Lexington* the whole time that he was in charge of Task Force 58. He did an excellent job. As I said he was an aviator. Let me give you this thought. Of course we haven't gotten to Saipan or Tinian or Guam but when we put the troops ashore on Saipan, the Japanese fleet left the Philippines for the first time since Midway to go attack a group. That I know of - this is also my story. A submarine torpedoed one of the big carriers. I think it was *Shokaku* or the *Shokaku* class, which is their big carrier. It put a torpedo into that ship and that ship started towards Japan. The fighter pilots, I guess the Skipper and I believe it was the Air Group Commander Snowden who volunteered to go with them. They took 12 F6F's and put external gas tanks on them and two 500 pound bombs and they flew from 600 miles, I'll say, to find that carrier. Before they left Admiral Mitscher told them, "Go and if any one of you gets shot down or gets in the water I'll steam the whole fleet through there to pick you up." We went out to get that carrier and they thought they saw it and they were about 600 miles from the carrier, at their maximum range. They found themselves attacking an island instead of a carrier. It was a reef that was awash and there they had lost all that altitude; at their limit of gasoline. It happened to be reef that was awash instead of the carrier. They just knew they had the carrier. They had to drop their bombs and their external fuel tanks, they had burned that fuel up as soon as they could to get rid of the



tanks so it would cut down on the drag on their airplanes. They dropped the bombs and came on back to the carrier. They didn't find that but it shows the courage of those fighter pilots.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they get back then?

Mr. McLellan

They got back to the carrier and we finished our tour of duty. But before we finished our tour of duty the Executive Officer came back to me and said, "We're running out of bombs. We're going to drop depth charges with contact fuses (which was a 350 pound charge) on the island of Guam to support whatever was going on at Gam." This was going on during Saipan and Tinian engagement. It was about over by that time. Norm Sterrie came to me and said, "If you want to go on this flight, this is the last one. I want you to pull out at least 6,000 feet above the ground." I said, "I want to go." So I went and dropped my bombs and couldn't report any results. I pulled out at 6,000 feet or maybe 5,000 feet and I went on back to the carrier with the group. Then we were relieved and I flew an old airplane from the *Lexington* to the *Enterprise*. The *Enterprise* came back to the States. We disbanded on July 23, 1944. Actually we were relieved on July 9, 1944 and disbanded when we landed back in San Francisco on July 23, 1944. They reformed and went to Key West, Florida and reformed on the August 23, 1944. I went from there on 30 days leave. I came home and was met by the group and that's when I had the party where I got my eye on my (future) wife Wanda. We've been together ever since. I then went to Torpedo Test Station in Newport, Rhode Island for my shore duty with Norm Sterrie as our Commanding Officer. By the way, I'm going to drop back and tell you this

story. Bob Isley was our Commanding Officer of Torpedo Squadron 16. He and my friend Dale Delgado were shot down over Saipan. The airport at Saipan, is named Isley Field, or was. I think it still is but I'm not sure. Bob Isley went to land his airplane. He didn't land, he crashed in the middle of the field in Saipan. Delgado got hit but he got out over the water and had to bail out of his airplane and his crew got out. Their parachutes were collapsed from Japanese machine gun fire. Bob Isley and his crew, when they found the airplane after the Marines secured that airbase found the airplane and the crew's ears were all cut off. That's the story. I don't know if it was true or not. Our fighter pilots and our air group shot down 150 airplanes. Let me read you this. This is on the back of "Ancient Order of the Deep" cards that we got when we crossed the equator after the first time that we went to Pearl Harbor. "I join the Ancient Order of the Deep." Our total summary of VT-16 we had 653 strikes, we dropped 480 tons of bombs; expended 53,000 rounds of ammunition, fired 221 rockets, laid 35 mines, dropped 17 torpedoes, got 5 torpedo hits. Planes destroyed: we destroyed 2 airplanes in the air and 2 probables, damaged 9 planes in the air, destroyed 19 planes on the ground. Ships destroyed or sunk: 93,500 tons. Ships damaged: 30,500 tons. That's our ball score.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was quite a record. But you only dropped how many torpedoes?

Mr. McLellan

17.

Mr. Misenhimer

For a torpedo squadron, that's not too many torpedoes.

Mr. McLellan

No, we didn't use torpedoes that much. As a matter of fact we didn't have the opportunity, really. Palau had a bunch of ships in there because that was the big staging point for the Japanese. The waters inside the Palau area islands, the water was just strewn with ships sticking out of the water, barrels of fuel, gasoline or what have you, boxes and things like that. It was just a mess at the island. *(Tape side ended.)*

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes there at Palau they sunk a lot of ships there.

Mr. McLellan

I made three or four attacks on Saipan. I bombed a sugarcane mill which I called the Saki-Factory on the beach of Saipan. I had a hit there. I was in an attack when I noticed a six plots of ground on the Saipan that looked like just square fields. It looked strange to me. I pulled out of the attack that I was on and went around and came back at an angle and came around across those six patches and I got good hits on those patches. They were oil storage tanks or ammunition storage. It was burning when I left there. I got a hit on a big tall building on Wake Island. You don't always see where your bomb hits. You are more interested in getting out of there than staying around to see what the results are. I got a hit on six of my first ten raids; I know that; and then several more hits later on that were scattered out more and I got shot down twice.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many total raids did you make?

Mr. McLellan

I think there were 26 raids.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you attacked by Japanese fighter planes very often?

Mr. McLellan

No. One time. At Tarawa I saw a seaplane getting away and my radio wouldn't work and I couldn't warn anybody, so he got away. That was a three-wing seaplane. I never saw one like it. I saw those five in the air when I was in the water at the Marianas Trench.

Mr. Misenhimer

The one that shot you down; was that a fighter plane?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. It was a Zero, a Zeke or a Zero. I think they are the same type of airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right. What else happened?

Mr. McLellan

I know one thing; I was glad to get back to San Francisco where the *Enterprise* came in to drop the air group off. We all came back together. We were disbanded there. When I stepped off of that carrier, I actually got down on my hands and knees and kissed the ground. It was quite emotional. It still is to a point. I went to Torpedo Test after that. Norm Sterrie was the commanding officer and he said, "You've had enough. I'm not going to send you with this new group to reform a squadron." I was thankful for that but I would have gone.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back and ask you a few questions. When you were on that shakedown cruise to Trinidad and down through there, were you all escorted by any destroyers or anything?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. I don't know how many we took with us, but we usually would have had at least two and maybe four destroyers on that run. There was always a destroyer behind the stern 70 degrees I think it is. He stays about 1500 yards behind the carrier to pick up any planes that may not make the carrier. I never saw them have to pick any up; maybe one or two that's about all.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like to go through the Panama Canal?

Mr. McLellan

I loved it. The Panama Canal, we were just barely able to get the *Lexington* in the Canal. The locks rather. As a matter of fact the catwalk on our carrier was damaged by a light pole that was out there. The light pole that we ran into I guess coasting to get up there. I think we had 8 inches to spare from the side at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned that when you all practiced, you practiced having 8 torpedo planes to come in from the front of a ship. You never actually used that in combat did you?

Mr. McLellan

One time. That was Kwajalein on that cruiser.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did it work?

Mr. McLellan

It worked fine. I got my torpedo released 600 yards from the cruiser. Some of them released a little further out. They showed someplace on this card that we got 5 torpedo

hits. That cruiser was just trying to get underway there because we surprised him. A submarine saw him the night before in there and radioed the message and we turned around and went back to Kwajalein. The *Lexington* was hit with a torpedo that night after the attack on Kwajalein. We were under torpedo attack from sunset until after midnight. Single planes from the Japanese would come in one at a time. We would start maneuvering action and turn into or away from incoming torpedoes. That went on from 6:00 until midnight. They dropped parachute flares out of the airplanes one time; I know because I saw them. But I don't think they did any damage to any ships that time. But just as the big full moon, just about as bright as it was last night, went down below the horizon; it evidently silhouetted us and they dropped a torpedo and hit the steering room of the carrier. It blew off one propeller out of four. We had four on there. It blew off that propeller and jammed a rudder to one full side. They centered the rudder finally but we had a slight bent shaft on that propeller that was blown off. We were doing 30 knots when we got hit. After we lost one propeller we had to slow down because we were short one propeller. We had to guide that ship by speed of the propeller. We went all the way back to Pearl Harbor on our own power.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did that happen?

Mr. McLellan

When we attacked Kwajalein on December 4, 1943. We went all the way back and dropped the speed to about 25 knots maybe to get out of the area and then dropped it to 20 knots the rest of the way.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. McLellan

This story has been written up in a book called "Mission Beyond Darkness." I don't know if you would have it but it is available. It was written by Lieutenant Commander J. Bryan, III and Phillip Reed and it's called "Mission Beyond Darkness." Published by Dewe, Loam and Pierce of New York. There are several pictures in it and names of all kinds. I have one copy. I've distributed what copies I've been able to get from my family, they are all deceased now; my family before me and what I could buy. Also, I did have one with Reed's signature in it that he gave me. They have all been written up in July 17<sup>th</sup> and I believe, I'm not sure about the other date, but July 17, 1944 and I'm saying the 4<sup>th</sup> of 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 1944, were the two different times it was written up in the magazine, my story, or at least partially my story. I completed 20 years by serving as Recruiting Officer of the 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District at Amarillo Training Center in charge of recruiting. Then at Olathe, Kansas Naval Air Station and finished my 20 years service in 1967. I retired from 27 years with the airline accumulated during that time also. I only had 6 ½ years of active duty. The second tour that I had of sea duty was VS-25, VS-21 both I believe in San Diego during 1948 and 1950. That was anti-submarine warfare (ASW work). When I got out and was released, when they did the big cutback occurred in 1950, I had been on duty 22 months I believe. I either had to revert from aviation duties to shipboard duties or get out. I wanted to get out and go back to school. I went back to Pittsburgh State University in Kansas. Kansas State University at one time it was called, to get my Master's degree in Industrial Education. I taught only a total of three years. I went back

into the Navy in 1948 and quit teaching.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs from World War II?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. After the battle at Tarawa we made the attack on Kwajalein and the ship picked up a torpedo, I got back to Hawaii and they were asking for volunteers to go aboard a jeep carrier to ferry new airplanes, or replacement airplanes to squadrons that needed them. I got to shore at Tarawa and there I picked up a parachute that was probably a US parachute that I picked up off of Tarawa. This was about a month after the Battle of Tarawa. I picked up a shell or two and believe it or not I picked up a tooth that was laying on the ground on the beach at Tarawa. There was still lots of evidence of casualties. One that I remember specifically was the pants and leggings of a Japanese soldier floating in the water on that beach. Inside the dugout was memorabilia; pictures that the Japanese had left there; mostly what I saw was Japanese women and that's all I'm going to say about that. I didn't get home with many souvenirs at all. I only got ashore one time other than that and that was just a trip to the beach with a can of beer and a swim inside the atoll which was beautiful water, clear with beautiful fish in it. Of the many airplanes in the Navy I think I enjoyed flying the airplanes they had at the Naval Torpedo Test Center at Newport, Rhode Island. By the way the biggest story that I can tell and I'm going to tell it now. The party that I mentioned that Mother gave me where I got better acquainted with my wife to be, Wanda Stewart; my thoughts when I was floating out there in the water was that I had no legacy to leave this world. My thoughts today are that God allowed me to meet Wanda and we have been together since



November of 1944. We've had three fine boys and we are proud of them and our family. My legacy now is about 21 and another one on the way; family members and they are all in Texas. My grandson and his wife and children are in Fayetteville, Arkansas. So they are close, but they are not close enough. That's my legacy.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a great legacy. How long have you been married now?

Mr. McLellan

November will be 63 years. We got married November 23, 1944. Last year our youngest son was married in Dallas, Texas on November 23, 2006. So we're proud of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your most frightening time?

Mr. McLellan

They are all about the same. When you are getting shot at and you see those tracer bullets, they look like they are going out in front of you. But actually you are flying into them is what is happening. They are coming up and you can't turn fast enough to get away from them. You can turn and it will throw the gunners off but not those bullets. I suppose the most frightening time would be, but you don't have time to think of it at an instant like that, in a second or two, when your plane is being hit by bullets and in my case when I had to bail out and the fire was driving me out of the cockpit; the smoke and the fire; I had to roll the canopy back to get a breath of air because of the hydraulic fluid and the gasoline fire. And then to try and figure out how to get out of that cockpit. You just don't stand up doing 150 knots and stand up in the windstream and get out. Having never been there before, didn't know what to expect in the first place. But when you have

to sit back down when you are halfway out of the airplane because you can't get out of it; that's kind of frightening to know that you are going to have to figure some way out right quick to get out of that airplane. All I could do was put my foot over in the one corner and somersault out to get myself out. Then I tried to hold on to the airplane to try to get underneath that horizontal stabilizer on the TBM. I was always afraid of that. You don't have time to really be afraid. Unconsciously you are afraid and you make mistakes that get you in trouble because you are trying to rush. But other than that, I'm just thankful that I was able to be picked up and to come back here and have that legacy and to thank all of those that helped me do it. My crewmen were two of the best guys that I have ever known. Both of them are dead now of natural causes. As a matter of fact, all three people that were actually in my crew are dead now from natural causes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. Here's something that I have not mentioned. I have copies of speeches that I have made like this one was for Wal-Mart Distribution Center here in Fort Smith on Veteran's Day. They have a good program there. I mentioned Tokyo Rose. I was talking about the *Lexington*. You know the *Lexington* that is down in Corpus Christi was the fifth *Lexington* that the Navy had. It had the nickname of the *Blue Ghost*. Tokyo Rose had reported it sunk several times. This ship was actually built, the keel beam has the name of Cabot on it I understand. I never saw it, I don't think. I may have one time. I think it was Cabot. The *Lexington* first carrier had been sunk at the Coral Sea. They told the Navy Department that they would get that carrier out a year earlier if they would rename this

carrier *Lexington*. Now whether they could speed it up that much or not, I don't know but they did and they got it out early and they nicknamed it the *Blue Ghost* because it always showed up after Tokyo Rose had pronounced it sunk.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you heard her over there, right?

Mr. McLellan

I heard her a few times, but not many times. I can't even remember the instance but I've always known about her. We didn't hear much radio out there, really.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned crossing the equator. What kind of a ceremony did you have when you crossed the equator?

Mr. McLellan

They always initiate the polliwogs is the best way I can describe it. When you cross the equator and when you cross the international date line there is always a ceremony on the ship to celebrate that fact. That's just a tradition that the Navy has. One of the pictures in *Life Magazine* was about crossing the International Date Line. They wrote messages on the bombs and I remember one, "Missionaries to Japan" or something like that. That was when we were crossing the international date line and we were going to deliver that message to them somewhere; I can't recall all of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. McLellan

I got the Asiatic-Pacific. The European Theater because of the anti-submarine patrols we

did on the shakedown. The Victor medal of course. The Presidential Unit Citation for the *Lexington* and crew. I think that was signed by Secretary Forrestal. I got a Purple Heart because of the burns I received. President Unit Citation. Air Medal with seven stars. That was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many battle stars did you get?

Mr. McLellan

I said seven but five of them were a silver. When you got five stars I believe you got a silver one. So that one silver one would be 25 and two bronze would be two more stars, so that would be a total of 27 I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out after World War II did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. McLellan

I had a little bit of a desire to stay in. I took a month or so to decide on that. Once I made my decision, no I had no trouble. I came home. Wanda and I left Newport, Rhode Island on a big snowy day and drove all the way to Asheville, North Carolina to see a friend down there before turning towards home. We drove on ice and snow all that 900 miles I think it was. I wanted to get home for Christmas. I think we did get home for Christmas but I'm not sure about that. In January I wanted to find a school so that I could complete my Bachelor's degree. I was looking for Industrial Education. My primary industrial work was woodworking and electricity and drafting.

Mr. Misenhimer

During World War II what was the highest rank that you got to?

Mr. McLellan

I believe that it was Lieutenant jg. It could have been Lieutenant because I think I was released from World War II as a Lieutenant and then made Lieutenant Commander and Commander in the Reserves.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions of VT-16?

Mr. McLellan

Yes. I've been to reunions. The first one was in Monterrey and I can't tell you the year. It was in Monterrey, California. I've been to the Queen Mary and Long Beach. I've been to Providence, Rhode Island. The last one was in Washington, D.C. at the dedication of the World War II Memorial. That would have been in May of 2005.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you have thought of from your time during World War II?

Mr. McLellan

Not that I know of. I don't know how you can put all of this together. I didn't know how to prepare for it really. I couldn't put all of this in order.

Mr. Misenhimer

You've done very well. Don't be concerned. I've really enjoyed talking to you today. It has been very interesting.

Mr. McLellan

I've had a good career and I'm appreciative of everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any experience with Halsey?

Mr. McLellan

No. Butch was the beginning of the night fighters that we had in the fleet. Butch O'Hare was one of them, I'm pretty sure he started that. I could be wrong about that. He was shot down. If it was Butch O'Hare that started it; he was shot down by one of our gunners who he was trying to join up on at night and they thought he was a Japanese coming up on them. But the TBM with an APS-20 Radar which is not good aerial radar at all; it is more for ground patterns flying and stuff like that. When they improved the antennas they could get airplanes on their screen and they could direct these night fighters who were flying F-6F's I think. They could vector them in on the targets. I don't know how many Japanese were shot down like that but that was our first night fighters. Then they put the F-6 and the F4-U and we had four night fighters aboard. All that stemmed from the night work that was done at Kwajalein when we were under attack for so many hours there and nothing could be done about going after those Japanese airplanes. That's what happened.

*End of Interview*

Transcribed by:

Lesle W. Dial  
Beeville, Texas  
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Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer  
P.O. Box 3453  
Alice, Texas 78333  
Home: (361) 664-4071  
Cell: (361) 701-5848