

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Ben Howden

Date of Interview: June 6, 2006

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Interview in progress.

Interviewer: This is Bob Phelps. Today is June 6, 2006. I'm interviewing Ben...

Mr. Howden: Howden.

Interviewer: This interview is taking place in Jackson, Mississippi at the Edison Walthall Hotel. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information Related to this site. If you would speak to the microphone with your name and address then we'll turn it off.

Mr. Howden: Ben Howden, 14825 W. Via Montoya, Sun City West, Arizona 85375.

Interviewer: Okay, so how did you get into the Navy?

Mr. Howden: Oh, I was...had about a half of a semester of school and...well...when I...was in the 1942 and I was about to be drafted, so I thought I'd...I wanted to get into flying so I enlisted in the Navy. It took awhile before they give me any orders to report for any kind of duty...but they sent me up to Madison, Wisconsin to take CPT training and (unintelligible) single-engine plane. And then about January 1st or so...in January I went to pre-flight in Iowa. From there to (unintelligible) for primary training and then Corpus Christi to...for more advanced training...Melbourne for tactical training...Vero Beach for

night fighter training...and then assigned to the Squadron VFN-106. We trained there for Quonset Point and then we went to...shipped overseas to Hawaii and they decommissioned us and broke up the Squadron and sent eight of us out to the fleet as a replacement in the night fighter squadron on the...on the Independence. Of course when I got there I...this isn't related to the battle, but I...I quick wrote a air mail letter to my brother who was on a destroyer out there, and the next day I got a light message back from him says, "Hey, I'll visit you in the afternoon." And he come over and that was just before Thanksgiving. And he asked me to visit him on the destroyer for Thanksgiving Day. I got permission from the Skipper to send him over there. And when I went aboard that destroyer...and with those gold wings, they treated me like a king! And then I guess we went on to operations. The first mission I had was a night fighter CAP combat air patrol around the fleet. They catapulted me out in the night and it was light when I was to land. Anyway, they were launching all the rest of the strikes on the Philippines at the time. And being out there...naive...I wanted to see what was happening and I started to fly around the fleet to see all these planes going in and they called me up and says, "Hey, are you lost?" I come back and circled the Independence and then landed. The first mission I had over the Philippines was the...Barney Barnett led me over one night on a harassing mission. We had two 500 pound bombs on our planes and we took off...it was in the night and we got over the Philippines. Barney led it most the way and...and took us up the coast...on the east coast of the Philippines and he thought he saw some

small cargos on one of those bays up there and we dropped our bombs on that. And we...I think they give us a probable on a couple of those. I come back and one of the 500 pound bombs hung up on me. They said, "You're going to have to bail out if you...you don't get rid of that bomb!" They weren't going to let me aboard with that bomb on it. Fortunately somebody...did recall that they had rigged an emergency release of these bombs on the...playing with a...by a D ring behind the seat and they told me to pull that and fortunately the bomb released. And I landed aboard on that. That's about it. I don't recall the...the...most of the other hops were just CAP or anti-submarine patrol.

Interviewer: Would you describe this as a normal mission? You know, sitting on the catapult...the whole sequence?

Mr. Howden: Oh well, the...they would bring you up to the catapult...the Signal man or the deck hands and rev up the engine and...and signal you for...get off and they'd shoot you off into the dark. And of course...of course you'd run your mission from there.

Interviewer: Were you on board during any of the kamikaze action?

Mr. Howden: No, I...never...out there for that. I was only out there for three...three months.

Interviewer: November, December, January...something like that?

Mr. Howden: Yeah, we come back in February...early February.

Interviewer: So you were there for the two typhoons?

Mr. Howden: Yeah, we were in the typhoon! I...the only thing I can remember about that...they did have a fire on the...one of the hanger...one of the elevators, but they put that out in short order.

Interviewer: After you got back to...with the Squadron...where were you deployed?

Mr. Howden: Uh, I went back to Melbourne to form a fighter squadron to go back out with day fighters and...of course the war ended. They shipped us up to Detroit with that fighter team of mine and I remember taking that team up on a practice op there in Detroit. And we were flying around the area and...it was a train down there...I figured we'd make a mock run on that, so I peeled off and led them down in there and I...I stayed about 500 feet trusting those kids wouldn't go any lower...they were knocking into the smoke of that train. (laughter). So...then we come back and got discharged about then.

Interviewer: In terms of...of the equipment that...the planes itself...any comments on how it flew or...?

Mr. Howden: No, it...it reacted pretty well as far I'm concerned.

Interviewer: It got you up and got you back! (laughter) Yeah, that's important!

Mr. Howden: Yeah!

Interviewer: Could you describe the qualification process when you..your first carrier flight and first night maybe?

Mr. Howden: Well, of course...they'd give you all this...carrier landing practice before they'd trust you with a plane on a carrier. That's all...they made sure you were pretty well qualified with the land...landing on the mock deck on land before they...

Interviewer: Field carrier landing practice or something like that?

Mr. Howden: Yeah, before they shipped you out to a carrier.

Interviewer: Any thoughts on any of the characters you met?

Mr. Howden: Uh, well, of course when we come back from overseas and went down to Melbourne, some of the other squadron members with us...of course, this TV Williams was with us who was with a squadron all the time and he got killed in a mid-air collision at Melbourne and I had to escort his body back to his home which was pretty duty, so...and that's about the only comment I got there.

Interviewer: Any other thoughts that you want to leave for us?

Mr. Howden: No, I don't think so. Like I told you, my...mine would be about a 10 minute...

Interviewer: That's fine...fine...and this is good enough. Like I said, we're going to transcribe this and send it back to you to take a look at.

Mr. Howden: Okay.

Interviewer: If you can think of anything else, let me hear it.

Mr. Howden: That's about it I guess.

Interviewer: Thanks for your help! Good work!

Mr. Howden: Okay.

(End of Interview; end of tape 1, side 1)

FINAL copy
CD - #1856- Ben Howden
Transcribed by: K. Matras
Houston, TX
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