

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

William Rex Hunter

Logansport, Indiana

September 3, 2008

Graduated Pilot Training July 28, 1943

Commissioned Second Lieutenant

15th Air Force, 95th Fighter Squadron, 1st Fighter Group, P-38

35 Combat Missions

Air Medal with Four Oak Leaf Clusters

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is September 3, 2008. I am interviewing Mr. William Rex Hunter by telephone. His telephone number is area code 574-722-3212. His address is 2804 Stadium Drive, Logansport, Indiana 46947. 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

Rex, 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. The first thing I would like to do is get an alternative contact. We have found out that sometimes in two or three years we try to contact a Veteran and he has moved or something has happened. Do you have a son or daughter or someone that you might give us a name and phone number in case we can't reach you?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. But I'm one of those older guys. I'm 86. I'll be here as long as I am here. I have a son. His name is Dr. Bill Hunter. His phone number is 814-734-2681. His address is 12247 Angling Road, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, 16412. He's a professor of English at Edinboro University.

Mr. Misenhimer

The next thing I need to do is read you to this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. 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 it to you to make sure it is okay. "Agreement Read." Is that okay with you?

Mr. Hunter

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Hunter

November 29, 1921.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Hunter

I was born in Bicknell, Indiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. I had a sister who passed away at 16 months and then I had a brother who died about 8 years ago. Then I had 3 stepbrothers and 2 stepsisters and they are all gone.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of your brothers and sisters in World War II?

Mr. Hunter

My brother was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he in Europe?

Mr. Hunter

He was in the Marines in the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

But he is no longer living, right?

Mr. Hunter

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about your sisters, were any of those involved in war work of any kind?

Mr. Hunter

No. One of my stepbrothers was in the Coast Guard. He was a pilot in the Coast Guard.

He's gone now too.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your brother that was a Marine, do you know where he might have been in the Pacific?

Mr. Hunter

Several places. He was an engineer, in construction. He was building airports and runways and things like that. So we went all over the South Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Hunter

I graduated from Epsom High School in 1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Hunter

First of all, I had a fall and broke my back. So I went to school to the third term at Indiana State. I was going to start Purdue in the fall but I didn't make it so I went to Indiana State.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you graduate from there?

Mr. Hunter

Eventually but it was not until I got back from the war. I have a Master's degree from there as well as an extra year.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your major?

Mr. Hunter

I was a teacher. I taught business and physical education and coached. I coached all the sports except football.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall where hearing about that?

Mr. Hunter

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you?

Mr. Hunter

I was at Indiana State. I worked for a dance band. I didn't play an instrument but I took care of the equipment. We got home at about 3:00 in the morning. I also carried the newspaper for the Terre Haute Tribute and so I went to the paper station and got my papers and carried them before I went to bed. So I woke up about 2:00 in the afternoon and turned the radio on and that's when I heard it.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Hunter

I knew that I was just the right age. I didn't want to go into the military and I had that broken back and that could have been an excuse, maybe. I took CPT, civilian pilot training in college, so I had about a total of 40 hours flying time. Then I enlisted in the Air Force seven days before the draft notice came.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date did you go in?

Mr. Hunter

September 6, 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer

You volunteered, is that right?

Mr. Hunter

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Air Force?

Mr. Hunter

When I was a little kid, I always wanted to fly. I would sit out in the front yard and watch those bi-planes go over. I lived in Odon then and the barnstormers would come by and take people for a ride. I didn't have the dollar to take a ride. So I went out and talked to him and he let me stay with the airplane all night, to guard it, and then he took me for a ride. So then I wanted to fly. When I went to college and I took the civilian pilot training,

I wanted to even more. That's why I went into the Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer

In that CPT, did you actually get your pilot's license?

Mr. Hunter

Yes, I got my license.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go into the Air Force at?

Mr. Hunter

I enlisted at Lafayette, Indiana and they immediately sent me over to Wright-Patterson who immediately sent me to San Antonio for classification. Classification was to determine if you were going to be a pilot, copilot, bombardier or navigator. I passed the pilot part.

Mr. Misenhimer

Wright-Patterson, that's in Dayton, Ohio, right?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. I went from Dayton, Ohio to San Antonio to Kelly Field.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel down there?

Mr. Hunter

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Hunter

It was fine. We had berths and had a Pullman, the whole smear. There were just about 8 of us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been out of the area before?

Mr. Hunter

Only as far as Detroit.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip, was it okay?

Mr. Hunter

It was fine. We got to see a lot of country we hadn't seen and we had nice bunks at night, so it was nice.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to Kelly Field, what did you do there?

Mr. Hunter

That was classification. When we first got there they were just getting that set up, so we lived in tents for about four weeks. Then they got us into the barracks. We were there for about six weeks. Then they gave us testing and stuff like that to make the determination whether we would fly, navigate or be a bombardier.

Mr. Misenhimer

And for about six weeks they did that then?

Mr. Hunter

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what did you come out of there as?

Mr. Hunter

A pilot. Pilot training in the Aviation Cadets.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go for your Cadet training?

Mr. Hunter

Santa Ana, California. I took ground school.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Hunter

It was fun. We met a lot of people, a lot of good guys. We weren't concerned about any war.

Mr. Misenhimer

Having your private pilot's license. Did that help you any there?

Mr. Hunter

Well yes, but in that area we just took PT and navigation and things like that. Things that I had not had a whole lot of in civilian training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the fact that you had a pilot's license, did that help you get pilot training classification?

Mr. Hunter

Not necessarily.

Mr. Misenhimer

I just wondered if that helped.

Mr. Hunter

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

The CPT was really not that much help to you in the service then?

Mr. Hunter

No except that I soloed quicker when I started flying.

Mr. Misenhimer

But not as far as paperwork?

Mr. Hunter

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Actually, I'm sure the experience was quite valuable.

Mr. Hunter

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there anything else in ground school?

Mr. Hunter

Not much. It was over Christmas of 1942. It was there at Los Angeles and we got to go into L.A. and Hollywood for a couple to three times. It was just another step in the order you had to travel.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get to the Hollywood Canteen or anything like that?

Mr. Hunter

No, but I went to some of the other places. I had a friend there who had been in college with me. He was an actor so he took us around a little bit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you meet any of the actors or anything?

Mr. Hunter

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you finished ground school, where did you go?

Mr. Hunter

I went to primary flying school at Cal Aero Flight School at Ontario, California.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Hunter

That was in a Stearman, a bi-wing Stearman. I had a civilian instructor. It was a civilian school and we lived in real nice quarters, two to a room. It was an aviation private school before the war. So they had all the facilities. We were there and all of our training was 8 weeks. We went from one place to the other after 8 weeks. 8 weeks. We lived there for 8 weeks and I think I soloed in about 4 hours of flight. Then we just continued flying until we got, I would say, probably 40 hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that Stearman to fly?

Mr. Hunter

Easy. I had flown a Waco just a little bit in Terre Haute so it was no big deal.

Mr. Misenhimer

They used a lot of those for crop dusters after the war.

Mr. Hunter

Yes they did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did any incidents happen or anything in primary?

Mr. Hunter

No, nothing. Just the routine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any accidents or anything like that?

Mr. Hunter

Not with me and I don't think we had any in our group. We may have had some guys ground loop or something like that but that was about it. We had nobody hurt.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Hunter

Oh no, they were gentlemen. They were doing a teaching job and they were doing a good job. If you were able to do what they wanted you to do, it was great. They would tell you to do something and if you were doing it right, they would just sit there and relax.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you do aerobatics with that Stearman?

Mr. Hunter

Oh yes, all of them, loops, spins and just everything. You had to, you had to learn how to do that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you went from there to basic?

Mr. Hunter

Basic training, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was where?

Mr. Hunter

At an air base in Merced, California. There we flew BT-13's, basic trainer 13's. They were a low-wing two-seater with the student in the front seat and the instructor in the back seat.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the cockpits open or closed?

Mr. Hunter

I'm sorry, it was reversed. The instructor was in the front seat and they were open cockpit.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that the one they called the Vultee Vibrator?

Mr. Hunter

No, I don't think so. The Navy may have called it that. I don't remember any particular nickname for it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it a Vultee?

Mr. Hunter

I can't remember

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about your training there?

Mr. Hunter

It was routine. We just advanced a little bit more, starting with flying in formation and learning, just advancing up the ladder, you know and how to fly in formation and doing a little practice dive bombing without any bombs or anything like that. It was just the necessary procedure that you had to learn.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any instrument training there?

Mr. Hunter

Yes we did have some instrument training there. We were under the hood but not very much. We got most of that in advanced.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about cross country?

Mr. Hunter

Yes, we had to take a couple of cross country flights. One in the day and one at night.

There was no big problem there because that area was pretty well lit up. You just followed the cement highway, the beams you know. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there any incidents there? Any accidents or anything?

Mr. Hunter

I don't recall any, not in our squadron. There were three training squadrons there. One squadron did not associate with the other squadron very much.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many men in a squadron?

Mr. Hunter

I would say probably 48.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did anybody washout along the way?

Mr. Hunter

Yes, there were a few that washed out along the way. They didn't quite get the gist of doing it. They just weren't able to do it. And then we had a couple that decided that they just didn't want to do it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go for advanced?

Mr. Hunter

Williams Field, Chandler, Arizona.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you fly there?

Mr. Hunter

AT-9. Twin-engine, two-seater, side-by-side. We flew the AT-9 and there my greatest problem was that I had a British instructor and trying to understand what he said was my greatest problem.

Mr. Misenhimer

In basic or advanced, were the instructors civilian or military?

Mr. Hunter

Military in basic and also in advanced. He was a British officer.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they pretty rough on you? How were they?

Mr. Hunter

None of the instructors were rough on you if you were able to do what they wanted you to do and if you tried to do it. In other words, if they were successful, you were successful. And if you were successful, that made them successful. If you were making them, if you were getting down what they wanted you to do, then it was no problem. I didn't have any problems with any of them except trying to understand that one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now an AT-9, I'm not familiar with that plane, what is that?

Mr. Hunter

The advanced trainer and I can't tell you the name of the company that made it, but it was a two-seater, side-by-side, low-wing and twin-engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

You're the first person that I've talked to that has mentioned that airplane?

Mr. Hunter

Oh?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Hunter

We had that and going forward, most of us that went there wanted to fly P-38's. That's why they sent us there, because the P-38 was twin engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did they start using the P-38?

Mr. Hunter

Oh my goodness. I would say about 1940 to 1941. A friend of mine from Lafayette, Indiana was in my squadron there. His brother was shot down in Alaska in P-38 before we started to do training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that advanced training.

Mr. Hunter

We did a lot of night flying and we did a lot of cross country. Then after we had more or less conquered the AT-9 they moved us into AT-6's for gunnery practice and dive bombing practice.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the AT-6 is a single engine?

Mr. Hunter

Right. So we flew both of them there, the single and the twin engine aircraft.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the AT-9, did that have retractable gear?

Mr. Hunter

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was fixed gear.

Mr. Hunter

Right and the AT-6 was fixed gear.

Mr. Misenhimer

The AT-6 was retractable.

Mr. Hunter

You're right.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Hunter

We went down to Ajo, Arizona for gunnery training. That was out in the desert. That was part of our training. We went down there for probably a week and a half or two. We did dive bombing and strafing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you do any aerial gunnery?

Mr. Hunter

Yes, that was it was the strafing. Also, they towed targets that we tried to shoot at.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was Ajo, Arizona?

Mr. Hunter

Mr. Hunter

This was south, almost into southern California.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were shooting at the sleeves being towed by the airplanes. Was there one more than one plane shooting at it?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. We were in formation. We were following one another.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you find out who hit the sleeve?

Mr. Hunter

You asked me a question that I really can't answer. I don't remember how they did it. You may be right, they may have had only one plane shooting. I know at one place they had different colored ammunition or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's what I've heard people say, that they would paint the ammo different colors from different planes, that way they could tell which one hit it.

Mr. Hunter

I had forgotten all about shooting at that sleeve being towed.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did anything in particular happen in that training?

Mr. Hunter

No, not that I recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where did you go?

Mr. Hunter

My girlfriend, at that time, came out for my graduation. We decided while she was out there to get married. So I graduated and got my wings in the morning and we got married that afternoon in the chapel with about 15 other couples.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date was that?

Mr. Hunter

July 28, 1943. That was the day that I got my wings.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were commissioned as a Second Lieutenant?

Mr. Hunter

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was where?

Mr. Hunter

Williams Field in Chandler, Arizona. We got married and we had our 65th wedding anniversary the 28th of July this year.

Mr. Misenhimer

Congratulations.

Mr. Hunter

Thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Hunter

We got leave and went to Terre Haute. That's where she lived. Then I went back out to California to get more advanced training. I flew P-38's. I went to Riverside for a while and then went back up near Santa Ana. When we got through there, she came out there to be with me for about two months. Then they shipped me to North Africa on a slow boat to China.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back to that training. How was the transition to the P-38?

Mr. Hunter

Back in advanced school I also flew another airplane that I forgot to tell you about, RP-322, which is a stripped down P-38. That's where we got some transition there. In our transition at Santa Ana, we were flying formation, just getting our skills better. We were flying formation and we would go up and play 'follow the leader' through the valleys and the clouds, trying to keep up with the guy ahead of you and he would try to lose you. Like I say, we flew a lot of formation and we did some gunnery practice. We shot at the sleeve and we did some dive bombing and that was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the P-38?

Mr. Hunter

I wanted to fly that from the first time I saw it. (Laugh) We went out to California to visit our daughter and we landed, I think, at either Vegas or something like that on the way out. As I walked out of the airplane to get into another airplane, the copilot was standing there and I said, "You made a pretty good landing." He said, "Yes". I said, "I used to make them like that in a P-38." He said, "I would give up all of the hours I have in this airplane just to fly that once." (Laugh) It was a great airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

It had some unique features didn't it?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. One of the greatest things about it was that you had two engines. Then the other, was that the guns were in the nose. On other fighters you had to shoot and hope that your ammunition and bullets came together out there where they were supposed to and that you got them there at the right time and the place. On a P-38 you didn't have to worry.

Mr. Misenhimer

And it had counter rotating props too didn't it?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. They had counter rotating props, no torque or anything like that. You just send her down the runway and she would go and takeoff. It was a safer landing.

Mr. Misenhimer

What guns did you have on it?

Mr. Hunter

I had four 50 calibers and one 20mm cannon.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you fire those separately?

Mr. Hunter

When they came to us, they were wired together. But all of us had them separated and a new button put in so that we could fire the machine gun separate from the cannon. We preferred it that way.

Mr. Misenhimer

I would think that would be the best way to have it, right. Then what happened?

Mr. Hunter

I went from North Africa near Oran to Italy.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go overseas?

Mr. Hunter

It was October of 1943 when we went over.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel over to Africa?

Mr. Hunter

A liberty ship. That's why I said it was a slow boat to China.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that trip?

Mr. Hunter

About four weeks. We had about 50 of us. They were hauling freight and there were about 50 of us on it. Before you get there, you eat out of metal pans and trays and they all

get greasy and you can't get them clean, and things like that. So it wasn't that pleasant.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were all 50 of you pilots?

Mr. Hunter

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were the sleeping accommodations like?

Mr. Hunter

They had regular bunks like they do on any small Navy ship. There were about six of us to a room.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did anybody get seasick?

Mr. Hunter

I didn't and I don't know, I didn't ask anybody else. I know they did but I don't know who.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you land in Africa?

Mr. Hunter

Oran.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were there how long?

Mr. Hunter

I would say six weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then you went to Italy?

Mr. Hunter

We went to Foggia, the 1st Fighter Group.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Africa did you get your airplanes then or not?

Mr. Hunter

Yes we got an airplane that was assigned to us. We flew that same airplane all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you took it down to Italy?

Mr. Hunter

No, they were there when we got there. We went to Italy on a transport.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, but was it the same plane that you had in Africa?

Mr. Hunter

No. The ones in Africa weren't prepared for combat.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about Foggia.

Mr. Hunter

It's a little town along the Adriatic, north of Bari on the east coast. Our field was a pasture field. We would just land and take off on the ground, the dirt. When we would take off with the P-38, we would take off in formation, four at a time. That way we were quickly assembled when we got into the air. It was just a little Italian town. We didn't do

much with it. There were not many places in there to eat. When we first got there, they had just gotten there and set up. So we had mess kits and stuff like that before they got us a dining hall. We were kind of primitive when we first got there.

Mr. Misenhimer

It hadn't been too long before that when they landed in Italy, had it?

Mr. Hunter

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Because Sicily was in July of 1943.

Mr. Hunter

Yes. So it wasn't too long before that, they had just gotten there.

Mr. Misenhimer

They hadn't gotten very far up Italy then.

Mr. Hunter

No. Bari is about 100 miles south of Rome, about even with Naples.

Mr. Misenhimer

What outfit were you with there?

Mr. Hunter

1st Fighter Group, Eddie Rickenbacker's outfit.

Mr. Misenhimer

What squadron?

Mr. Hunter

95th Squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which Air Force?

Mr. Hunter

15th Air Force. You're taxing my memory, you know that? (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

(Laugh) That's the purpose of this. Tell me what all happened there?

Mr. Hunter

We were just there and we flew missions, mostly escort for bombers. We did have one or two strafing missions. One of the things was Monte Cassino. The interesting thing about that, you know they bombed that for about one whole day and we were sitting up above them, just protecting them from any German fighters that felt brave. There wasn't anything that went on. They just bombed and we just sat up there and they bombed. We would do our time and leave and another group would come up and take over. That was one of our missions. Another mission that we had was strafing up in the northwestern part of Italy. That was one of the missions. But most of ours was escort. We did have one strafing mission to southeastern France, across the Mediterranean.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you involved around Anzio at all?

Mr. Hunter

We did some things around the edges of it, but nothing particularly directly with it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not sure when they finally broke out of Anzio. It was maybe the first part of 1944.

Mr. Hunter

I think it was in 1944. I was with the 1st Fighter Group about eight months. Then I went up to Bari, Italy. They were allowing people to stay over there if they wanted to. I didn't fly anymore combat after that. They were allowing us to stay over, so I joined up with what they called a service squadron. Our job was three-fold. We would haul freight. We would also test aircraft after they were repaired and we would go pick up passengers. Jack Haley, the movie star, I hauled him around down there. And Kathryn somebody, I can't think of her name. I made one of the poorest landings I ever made with her on the aircraft. A crosswind got me. We flew C-53's and C-47's and a P-47 every once in a while. I flew a B-17, a B-24, a B-25, an AT-6 and A-20 and that's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a lot of different airplanes.

Mr. Hunter

We had P-47's where they had to reinforce the wing. So we tested them after they did that. The first time, after being in a P-38, we were talking about torque, that P-47 had torque. I tried taking off and the first time I tried taking off with it, I almost took off sideways. But we got through that. Then we would haul freight here and there. We would take officers off for R&R. We flew one bunch to Palestine and Alexandria, Egypt and Cairo and so on. We did a lot of different things there. Then I got my time in and I came home in 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

When in 1945?

Mr. Hunter

I got released from service. I got home just as the European war was over. I went down to Florida for reassignment and they let me out. They let several of them out at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that would have been June of 1945 or some such?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. Then I went back to college.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were with the 1st Fighter Group, how many total combat missions did you fly?

Mr. Hunter

35.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any dogfights with German planes?

Mr. Hunter

Oh yes. I got credit for one, an FW-190.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were the German planes compared to ours did you think?

Mr. Hunter

They were good and they were good pilots. The only thing is that we had the advantage of more power and a little more speed and we could maneuver better, even with a P-38, we could out maneuver them. We could do things that they couldn't do. One of the biggest tricks was, with two of the engines running at high rpm, you pull the throttle back on one and hit the same rudder. You only wanted to do that if you were 10,000 feet in the

air so that it would give you time to recover. You could lose them that way.

Mr. Misenhimer

Didn't they have cannons in some of those planes too?

Mr. Hunter

I really don't know. That was so long ago that I studied the German aircraft that I really can't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you come home with holes in your plane any time?

Mr. Hunter

Yes, I had a couple or three.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about antiaircraft, was there much antiaircraft?

Mr. Hunter

Always when you got near the targets. We were fortunate. We didn't go into that very much because the bombers didn't expect us to because if we didn't go in, their fighters wouldn't go in either, into the flak. So there was no point in us going in there. We would just hang around outside until they came out of the flak and then take up flying over them again.

Mr. Misenhimer

We lost quite a few bombers over there didn't we?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. We had several. You remember Polesti. Most of our trips were to there.

Mr. Misenhimer

You went to Polesti?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. Not that first big mission when they went from North Africa, but we had a lot of them after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

That is quite a distance isn't it?

Mr. Hunter

It was about an 8 hour round trip.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have wing tanks, droppable tanks?

Mr. Hunter

Yes, we had wing tanks. We needed them on every mission. Then we would get to the target and if we were being attacked or anything, we would just drop them.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the range on the P-38?

Mr. Hunter

I've been asked that question and I really can't answer that right now. With the belly tanks that we had, I should know, but I don't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, if you went for 8 hours it had to be quite a ways.

Mr. Hunter

Yes. You would use the belly tanks going in. It would go 1,000 miles.

Mr. Misenhimer

Are you familiar with Charles Lindbergh going to the Pacific and helping the pilots there increase their range on the P-38's?

Mr. Hunter

I heard about that, yes. And running them with lower mixtures and things like that. We could do that. We could pull the mixture back and throttle back and fly at lower speeds and let the engine have less gas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, they said that they almost doubled the range of the P-38 down there in the Pacific.

Mr. Hunter

Yes, they could do that.

Mr. Misenhimer

The distances were so vast down there.

Mr. Hunter

Yes. Every mission we had was practically over the Adriatic. We had an island called the Isle of Vies over off of Yugoslavia. That's where the beat up bombers and so forth would land on their way back and not try to cross the water. When I was down in Bari, one of our jobs was to fly those planes out of there from a 2,500 foot runway. We would take all the guns and everything out of them and put them on a transport plane. The pilot and the crew chief were the only ones that would be in the airplane and we would fly them back over to Italy for repairs.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you like flying those transport planes?

Mr. Hunter

It was just like sitting in a rocking chair. No problem. We had the C-53 and the C-47's.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is a C-53?

Mr. Hunter

It is the passenger version of the C-47. The C-47 has double doors for loading. The C-53 has one door and it has passenger seats.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the civilians they called it a DC-3.

Mr. Hunter

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else?

Mr. Hunter

That's about it. We just did those things out of Bari and then I came home and went back to school and started teaching for four years and then I was called back in during the Korean War. There I was with the 434th Troop Carriers Group at Bacallar Air Force Base down at Columbus, Indiana. The whole group was called back. Since I had a guidance certificate and a Master's Degree, they put me as Personal Affairs Officer for the group. While I was there, I applied to teach Air Force ROTC. But my application for that went through Langley Field, Headquarters of TAC and they stopped it. They called me up there and asked me if I would take over Personal Affairs for the Command. So we moved to Langley and while I was there, having been a coach and worked in athletics, the

Director of Recreation for the Command, he left and they put me in charge of that. So some of my duties there were recreation for all the TAC air bases in the United States. Another thing, I was on a committee to reopen bases in the United States. So we flew around to different ones and my job was to see living conditions and recreation and so forth throughout the area of the bases and then go back and write it up and turn it. We did that. Then after I was there a year, I got orders, unbeknownst to go to the University of Buffalo in New York to teach Air Force ROTC. (Laugh) I went up there and did that for a year. Then when things started quieting down I got out and came back and started teaching down near Turkey Run State Park. Then in 1954 we came to Logansport to teach. Here I was the head baseball coach and well as the accounting and typing teacher.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you recalled for Korea?

Mr. Hunter

1951.

Mr. Misenhimer

First part of the year or when?

Mr. Hunter

It was right when school was out in May.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in then for Korea? You got out in 1954?

Mr. Hunter

I got out in the fall of 1953. I taught a year down there in Turkey Run before I came up here in 1954.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, back to World War II, what was the highest rank you got to during World War II?

Mr. Hunter

During World War II, I was a First Lieutenant. I retired as a Major.

Mr. Misenhimer

After how many total years?

Mr. Hunter

I started in 1942 and ended in 1962.

Mr. Misenhimer

So 20 years.

Mr. Hunter

I got 20 good years. *(Tape side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

During World War II, what medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Hunter

I've got that here somewhere. I got the Air Force Medal of course and combat theater medals and that's about it. I think that Air Force Medal had four clusters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get what they called the Air Medal?

Mr. Hunter

Yes, the Air Medal.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any oak leaf clusters on it?

Mr. Hunter

Four.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you feel the morale was in your unit?

Mr. Hunter

It was good. I never noticed any morale problems at any time at any place in the service. During World War II it was alright. During the Korean War it was a snap as far as I was concerned. Everybody at Langley Field, while I was there, was more or less permanent. So they had conditions and good relations so they didn't have anything to complain about. During the war itself of World War II, the people there had a job to do and we were all friendly and we liked one another, so it wasn't that big of a problem.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your 35 missions in World War II, that was all with the 1st Fighter Group?

Mr. Hunter

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Hunter

No. The reason I didn't get home with any souvenirs. Yes. I did. I got home with a German Luger but it disappeared. I bought my wife some silk hose over there and some other stuff and they disappeared on the boat on the way back. I didn't get home with any.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Hunter

Oh yes, but don't ask me what they were.

Mr. Misenhimer

No big names then?

Mr. Hunter

Jack Haley.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Hunter

Only after missions. They would be there with a drink and a donut.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they charge you for them or were they free?

Mr. Hunter

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were overseas, could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Hunter

Oh yes. Where we were it was not problem. We were in one place all the time and it came fairly regularly, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you first went in, what was your pay? Do you recall?

Mr. Hunter

I think it was \$74 a month as an Aviation Cadet.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what was it as a First Lieutenant?

Mr. Hunter

I really can't tell you. Maybe \$170 or \$180.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course, you were married so you had some kind of an allowance for her to.

Mr. Hunter

Yes and most of it came back anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Axis Sally when you were over there?

Mr. Hunter

No. I never did. Other guys talked about it but I never heard her. I never heard her on the radio at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then they had Lord Haw Haw, did you hear him?

Mr. Hunter

I knew about him, but I don't recall hearing him.

Mr. Misenhimer

On April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Hunter

I was on the ship coming back from overseas.

Mr. Misenhimer

What reaction did people have to that?

Mr. Hunter

Well, you know we had the little radio and the Captain picked it up. I think it was shock but more or less expected.

Mr. Misenhimer

Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945. Where were you then? Were you at home by then?

Mr. Hunter

Playing golf in Terre Haute.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any kind of a celebration?

Mr. Hunter

No, wait a minute. I was playing golf when the Japanese war was over. When the war was over in Europe I was home on leave, out playing golf.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any kind of a celebration?

Mr. Hunter

No. At the moment, I really can't recall because to me it was just pretty much business as usual.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they talk about sending you to the Pacific at all?

Mr. Hunter

There were rumors going around that when I finished over in Italy that they were bringing P-38 pilots back to the States for a month or two and then sending them on to

the South Pacific. I decided that I didn't leave anything over there that I wanted to go get.

That's when I volunteered to stay over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan did surrender, did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Hunter

I think we did. I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was August 15, 1945.

Mr. Hunter

I think we did.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Hunter

No, not really. Ours was so much different than Infantry. We were pretty much civilians when we were on the ground anyway. We didn't know war until we got in the air, so it wasn't that big of a difference to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. I went back to school and I used it to buy a house.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Hunter

Not with my military group, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Hunter

No. Not particularly, just that it was a time in your life that you went through, you know.

It was so long ago that there are a lot of things that I know I have forgotten, either on purpose or just accidentally. I just don't remember that much.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Hunter

Getting shot at.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did that happen pretty often?

Mr. Hunter

No. I guess the craziest time was when we went up on that strafing mission up to Genoa, Italy on the northeastern part. That's the one I couldn't think of earlier. We went in there, strafing and we couldn't get out because it clouded in over us. And you don't ever want to fly back over the target you just strafed. So we started climbing. We broke up and it's a wonder we didn't run into one another because we couldn't see anything. I broke out at about 27,000 feet. All by my self. So I headed south. I knew I didn't really have enough fuel to get back to Bari, so I went to Sicily and landed and got fuel and then went on home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did everybody make it home from that point?

Mr. Hunter

Yes. Everybody made it. Everybody made it separately.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the officers you had over you, the higher up officers?

Mr. Hunter

Oh, they were just like us. We were all there for the same purpose. They ran the organization and we just worked in the organization.

Mr. Misenhimer

They talk so much now about PTSD, post traumatic stress disorder.

Mr. Hunter

Yes, that's mostly ground troops.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any of that after World War II?

Mr. Hunter

No. I did not. I'm sure it was around. I had a friend that I knew in college after the war.

He had been injured and wounded but he was just as strong mentally as anybody else.

They had the rough times. We were fighting a gentleman's war, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

They called it 'shell shock' a lot of times then too.

Mr. Hunter

Yes, at that time they were calling it shell shock. Now they've got a high faluting name

for the same thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes PTSD, post traumatic stress disorder.

Mr. Hunter

Right, they had to come up with something.

(End of Interview)

Transcribed by:

Lesle W. Dial

Beeville, Texas

September 27, 2008

Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer

P.O. Box 3453

Alice, Texas 78333

Home: (361) 664-4071

Cell: (361) 701-5848