

*National Museum of the Pacific War*

*Nimitz Education and Research Center*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. Richard Matthews**

Date of Interview: January 7, 2009

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**Interviewer: Ed Metzler**

Mr. Metzler: This is Ed Metzler. Today is January 7, 2009. I'm interviewing Mr. Pete Matthews. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center of 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. Let me start out, Pete, by thanking you for spending the time today and coming down here to share your World War II experiences with us, and let's get you started by having you give us your full name, when and where you were born, stuff like that.

Mr. Matthews: My full name is Richard Frank Matthews, and I'm commonly known as Pete. I was born in Wichita, Kansas, November 16, 1919.

Mr. Metzler: What'd your Dad do for a living?

Mr. Matthews: Well, he worked at the Caterpillar Company, and that's about all I remember him doing.

Mr. Metzler: Did they have a manufacturing facility in Wichita?

Mr. Matthews: No, no, we were just down there for about six weeks, then we went back to Kansas City, Missouri, where I grew up.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Matthews: What they were doing down there, I don't know.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, but you just happened to be born down there, right?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: What about brothers and sisters?

Mr. Matthews: I have one brother; his name was Merle, and he was a paratrooper in the Army, and I had a sister, who was crippled from birth.

Mr. Metzler: I'll be darned. And your Mom, she was a house--I guess they called them housewives back then; they don't dare call them that now.

Mr. Matthews: She was Edna Matthews and she was divorced and remarried to a very nice person by the name of Guy Hawkins, and she became Edna Hawkins.

Mr. Metzler: I see, okay.

Mr. Matthews: A very nice marriage, the second marriage.

Mr. Metzler: So, you were raised in Kansas City.

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Kansas City, Kansas or Missouri?

Mr. Matthews: Missouri.

Mr. Metzler: On the Missouri side.

Mr. Matthews: I went to Central High School in Kansas City and then I--

Mr. Metzler: So, you graduated from high school sometime in the late 30s, I guess.

Mr. Matthews: January 1937, and I worked there for a year and then went down to the University of Missouri, and while I was there, two naval pilots flew in from St. Louis to the University of Missouri, was in Columbia, Missouri. They flew in from St. Louis and were recruiting.

Mr. Metzler: This was before the war started?

Mr. Matthews: Before the war started. This was in the spring of 1940--no, '41, I believe. I got interested in it and checked into it and found out that I needed to have a few more credits, so I went to summer school in Kansas City, at the University of Missouri extension in the city. That picked up enough credits; I joined the Navy on October 27, 1941, which all the personnel were dressed in whites, and I asked this officer that enlisted me, how come, and he told me it was Navy Day.

Mr. Metzler: I'll be darned. Now, what caused you to not continue your college education, because I mean the war hadn't started yet, so they weren't going to draft you or anything, were they? What was going through your mind then?

Mr. Matthews: Well, I think they were drafting at the time, and so I joined then and as you know, on December 7 the war started. I was called to active duty on December 4, 1941.

Mr. Metzler: Well, your timing was elegant, wasn't it?

Mr. Matthews: Yes. Well, I got to pick what I wanted to do, and I went to e-base at Kansas City, Kansas, and it was quite an experience. I'd never flown before.

Mr. Metzler: Where'd you do your basic?

Mr. Matthews: Well, that was it.

Mr. Metzler: That was your basic there, okay.

Mr. Matthews: It was quite interesting. One interesting thing that happened was--it didn't happen to me, but one guy, they were taking off and this pilot, he was a student, thought he was pulling up too fast, and he shoved the stick forward. The guy hadn't attached his seat belt but he did have his parachute on (laughs) and it threw him out of the plane.

Mr. Metzler: Good Lord!

Mr. Matthews: Well, but he pulled the cord and he landed safely. I thought that was an interesting sight that might be--

Mr. Metzler: That was an eye opener for him, wasn't it?

Mr. Matthews: Yes, he kept his seat belt attached after that.

Mr. Metzler: He never forgot that again, I'll bet.

Mr. Matthews: Right.

Mr. Metzler: So, your plan was to be a pilot then. Is that correct?

Mr. Matthews: A pilot, right. I passed basic training and went to New Orleans and the Navy base down there and we spent most of our times there with Morse code. We had to learn that, and we couldn't leave the base until you could do ten words a minute without an error. Even after I got to that point, I couldn't leave the base because I didn't have enough money. There wasn't anything to do, so--

Mr. Metzler: (Chuckles). Maybe it's just as well you stayed on base.

Mr. Matthews: Stayed on base. Never got to see New Orleans. We then went down to Pensacola, and I was in Class 2-B-42PC, which is the middle of February, 1942, Pensacola Cadet; that's what that stood for, and I took--

Mr. Metzler: So, what kind of aircraft were you flying during your training?

Mr. Matthews: Ah, N-3N, biplane.

Mr. Metzler: The old biplane trainer, huh?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, but boy they were safe, real safe. It was very interesting learning how to fly. I didn't--I hadn't any idea what it was like.

Mr. Metzler: Did you feel like it came to you naturally? I mean how did it feel?

Mr. Matthews: Well, I was the type of person that, on the second floor, I didn't like to look out the window. (Mr. Metzler laughs).

Mr. Metzler: So it's logical to be a pilot then, right?

Mr. Matthews: (Laughs). I ultimately became a dive bomber.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, my goodness.

Mr. Matthews: Which I thoroughly enjoyed. After you get used to it and get used to the airplane, why, it's just a whole lot of fun.

Mr. Metzler: But the first time up must have been a bit of a white knuckle experience.

Mr. Matthews: Yes, it was. It was.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about that first time up. What do you remember?

Mr. Matthews: Well, the guy that was my pilot, he was doing things that--I think I urked over the side.

Mr. Metzler: I haven't heard that term for vomit in a long time.

Mr. Matthews: Well, I thought it'd be a nicer--

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, you were trying to clean it up for us, weren't you?

Mr. Matthews: But I got used to it, bumping around and so forth. It was new, and I had to get accustomed to it, and so I did. When I went to Pensacola, I remember one interesting incident. I was going to-- I had night flying and we went to another base to do that--and I was at a corner waiting for my bus, and I noticed that a block away they were having a parade. So I walked halfway, about a half block, to watch the parade, and a ninety-day wonder, who was an ensign, came over and asked me what I was doing. And I told him I was waiting to go night flying, but I saw the parade

and I walked over to watch the parade. He put me on report for watching the parade without permission.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, man.

Mr. Matthews: No, really.

Mr. Metzler: Get a life!

Mr. Matthews: And I had five hours of extra duty walking back and forth with a gun.

Mr. Metzler: Guard duty.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: So, what do you think about ninety-day wonders as a result.

Mr. Matthews: Not too much. (Both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: They didn't really deserve to be doing some of the things they did.

Mr. Matthews: And actually, we had one in, when I was in basic training in Kansas City, Kansas, that used to, when he came into the room, you had to stand at attention. Nobody liked him, and I guess he knew that, because one night around--after we were all in the sack--he came through and made us get up and go out and wash the airplanes.

Mr. Metzler: In the middle of the night.

Mr. Matthews: Well, it was about eleven, twelve, somewhere in that neighborhood. We had to wash the airplanes, whether they needed it or not.



Mr. Metzler: So, he became a real favorite of you guys.

Mr. Matthews: Oh, yes! And one time he came into the room and they yelled, "Attention!" and I was right in his path and I stood at attention, but I stiffened and he ran into me but he moved, I didn't. I was ready for him. He didn't do anything about that because I was standing at attention for him. He tried to bump me out of the way, and I was just big enough, he didn't make a big move. So it was very interesting at Pensacola; I thoroughly enjoyed that. The instructors were nice; everybody was nice there.

Mr. Metzler: Did you get any liberty into the town of Pensacola itself while you were there?

Mr. Matthews: Oh, we had every--I think we had every eighth day off is what we had and you'd go into Pensacola, I guess. I don't really remember much about that.

Mr. Metzler: So this is wartime, though, so it's probably mobbed with military and naval, you know, the naval air station there and everything.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. Pensacola was quite a large station (unclear), and so I don't remember a thing about going into town. It was just--I guess we'd just go into town for something to do but I don't remember much about it. We didn't have any cars; we had to go on a bus and had to be ready to come back on the bus that was provided by the Navy.

Mr. Metzler: When did you go overseas? How did that happen?

Mr. Matthews: Before that though, I finished up at Pensacola and was transferred to Opa Locka, around Miami, Florida. Opa Locka Naval Air Station. We advanced to SNJs there, and that's where I learned to do more, stunt flying and so forth. You had to be able to do that in order to control the airplane. That was quite interesting. There was one thing where they showed you how to be careful because you would pull the plane up too soon and it would go into a spin. It'd spin out on you, and this one pilot showed me how that happened, and pulled it up and even at cruising speed of a hundred and--I forget exactly what they cruised at--150 miles and hour, knots, and he'd pull it up and go into a spin and he'd pull it out too fast and he'd go into another spin. It was the most violent maneuver I'd ever been in, and boy, it was really something. He asked me if I wanted to do it, and I said, "No, I've learned how." And that was enough.

Mr. Metzler: Wow! Tell me about the SNJ aircraft.

Mr. Matthews: Wonderful airplane! They had us take them up to--we had to get up to around 20,000 feet with them and they weren't supercharged or anything, so I took it up to--I got it to about 20,250 feet as I recall. There wasn't enough wind up there or air, to give it stability, but they wanted us to go up and see what

it was like. You had to wear oxygen. But boy, that was a good airplane.

Mr. Metzler: What was the nickname for that aircraft? Did it have a name other than SNJ? I'm showing my ignorance here.

Mr. Matthews: The Army called it an AT-6; best I can recall is just SNJ.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. They didn't have a name for it then.

Mr. Matthews: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Metzler: But it wasn't a biplane; it was a monowing, right?

Mr. Matthews: Right, low wing monoplane. One interesting episode that happened, it wasn't in one of those; it was in a plane that the Navy had discarded and we were using it in training. It was a three-seater. I forget what the third seat was for, but I was up on a mission, training mission, and it was the day Virginia was coming into Pensacola--er, Miami--and we were going to get married. I don't know whether you remember but back in the olden days, they had a lot of war pictures. Remember the airplanes with the smoke coming out the back of them? Well, that's what happened with this one. Something, an oil leak of some nature, I guess it got on the manifold and it was streaming out the back end I had to go in for an emergency landing. There was no problem; I made it back but when you have an emergency landing, you couldn't get out of the airplane until the medical crew got there. They had to help you out of the

airplane, and you had to go in and see the doctor and so forth. Here, Virginia was going to come in at 3:15 on the plane--the train--and I was worried about--

Mr. Metzler: Being late?

Mr. Matthews: --being late and it would have just been petrifying for her. I explained it to them and they finally let me go, and I went down and got her on time.

Mr. Metzler: So you got there on time and you went ahead and got married and everything.

Mr. Matthews: Got married.

Mr. Metzler: That's good.

Mr. Matthews: Miami, that was another nice base. I enjoyed flying there. That's where we learned--we did snap rolls, slow rolls, Immelmans, loops, and falling leaf, to learn how to control the airplane. It was a fine airplane, and that's about it, I guess, for training. While you were there, and this is kind of interesting, we had a meeting and they put your name in a hat, you put your name in a hat, and this is the way they selected the guys that went into the Marine Air Corps instead of the Navy. If your name was picked out, you were for such-and-such a time, you went to the Marines.

Mr. Metzler: So was going to the Marines good or bad in the eyes of everyone?

Mr. Matthews: Well, it depends upon what the guy thought. But that's the way they picked at that time. They picked out of a hat.

Mr. Metzler: Out of a hat.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. I ended up being a Navy pilot. After Miami, I went up to Chicago to qualify for carrier landings. We qualified on Lake Michigan with a side-wheeler. The Navy had put a deck on it and that's what we qualified on.

Mr. Metzler: You landed on that?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: That's interesting. I've never heard that before.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. That's what it was. I put Virginia in a room someplace; I don't know how I found it but I did, and I told her I'd be back that night. Well, they wouldn't let us go home. They kept us on this side-wheeler overnight and she didn't know.

Mr. Metzler: You didn't call her on your cell phone?

Mr. Matthews: Didn't have a cell phone (Mrs. Matthews laughs in background). Not then. At any rate, we finished qualifying the next day, and I went back home to Kansas City and then on to San Diego, and joined Air Group Three, I believe it was.

Mr. Metzler: How hard was it to land on a ship, compared to just landing on a normal runway? Was that a big step up in difficulty for you guys, or what?

Mr. Matthews: No, you'd land on a runway; practice that for a long time before you go on a ship. You have a landing signal officer and he, as I recall, he was there on land, and he'd go through all this--

Mr. Metzler: Go through all the motions, and yeah.

Mr. Matthews: --and I found it to be very simple, because I followed his directions. He'd tell you if you were low or high or just right, and then he'd cut and you'd land. When I was at sea, I would always land and hit the first wire, which was fine, except one time I hit the third wire, and you feel like you're going into the barrier and it really brings you to an abrupt stop. But no, if you have a good landing signal officer, it's no problem at all. You just follow his directions and handle your plane at just above stalling speed, so that when he gives you the cut, you'd plop right down on the deck. That was fun.

Mr. Metzler: So you passed that part of your training then, on the side-wheeler.

Mr. Matthews: Yes, on the side-wheeler. That was our first experience landing on an airplane--an airplane on a carrier.

Mr. Metzler: So what happened then?

Mr. Matthews: Then I went to San Diego and Commander Beebe was our skipper. Boy, he was a good one.

Mr. Metzler: Skipper of--?

Mr. Matthews: The squadron. We were a bombing squadron.

Mr. Metzler: You said it was Bombing Group Three? Is that what you said?

Mr. Matthews: Air Group Three.

Mr. Metzler: Air Group Three.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. He was our skipper.

Mr. Metzler: Go ahead.

Mr. Matthews: We would do an awful lot of dive bombing with the little five-pound bombs that you would drop down, and somebody would fly around and record where your bomb dropped.

Mr. Metzler: So, this is still on land training.

Mr. Matthews: On land training.

Mr. Metzler: This is in the San Diego area.

Mr. Matthews: In San Diego, off of Coronado. That's where we were stationed. We'd go out to dry lakes. I think there was one that was Clark dry lake; we used to bomb that a lot. Beebe was very good at this, and he would have us go up, oh, around eleven, twelve thousand feet, and we were doing it as a group. He would start you out into your dive long before you got to the target area, so that you could see the target. I'll explain later on why this was important. You could see the target and go down and drop your bomb and pull out. Later on, when I was overseas, I was transferred to another squadron and that's how I happened to be on CV-26.

Mr. Metzler: That's (unclear)?

Mr. Matthews: Air Group 26, right. R.Y. McElroy was our; Rodham Yotam (?) was his name. He was our skipper there. We were going out on a bombing trip to--I can't think of the name of it right now--at any rate, he would go up and get right over the target and then go down. You couldn't see your target; you'd miss it. So I was riding back in the jeep with him and I told him that I thought he should things a little differently. I was still and ensign, I think. He didn't like it too well.

Mr. Metzler: He didn't take that too well?

Mr. Matthews: No. I told him and then I mentioned that Commander Beebe showed us how to do it, and what to do and so forth. The next bombing tour that he led, that's how he did it, just exactly like Beebe did, and we could see the target. He didn't like me very well, but--

Mr. Metzler: You were making friends right and left, weren't you?

Mr. Matthews: Well, that's the way it should be done.

Mr. Metzler: That's right.

Mr. Matthews: This Commander Beebe knew--he was just a wonderful pilot and a wonderful person. I really liked him. We were stationed on--

Mr. Metzler: Well, now let's see. You're still--last time I checked you were still training in San Diego, so when did you get assigned to a ship? Or did you?



Mr. Matthews: Well, yeah, we went overseas. I'm trying to think; I think in March of '42, March of '42, we were on the Matsonia.

Mr. Metzler: That's a transport ship that used to be a luxury liner.

Mr. Matthews: Right, right. We went over to Hawaii on that, and on board was a family that helped get the Hawaiian Islands started back in the olden days; a guy by the name of Cook. Cooks are quite a name on the island. When we got there, Mrs. Cook invited us up to her house for a cocktail party or something.

Mr. Metzler: Just the flyboys or everybody on the ship?

Mr. Matthews: No, no, just our air group. So I went up there with my buddy, Ray Wicklander, and while we were, Admiral Nimitz showed up at the door.

Mr. Metzler: Now this is before you even went down into the south Pacific or anything. You were kind of on the way.

Mr. Matthews: We were on the way. He came up to the door and he had--he was going to take Mrs. Cook to some affair.

Mr. Metzler: Is this Cook as in C-o-o-k? Is that how you spell it?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Matthews: So my buddy and I got tired of the party and we decided we'd go back to the hotel. We were walking down and the Admiral came along in his car, and he was driving it; he didn't have a driver.

Mr. Metzler: The admiral was driving it?

Mr. Matthews: He was driving it.

Mr. Metzler: I didn't know that.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: I thought all those high guys had drivers.

Mr. Matthews: Well, he did, but on this occasion, he was driving, and Mrs. Cook was in the front seat, and he stopped and picked us up and took us to our hotel. That was--

Mr. Metzler: That's special!

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, that was really something.

Mr. Metzler: So you were on your best behavior in that ride, I bet.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. I don't remember too much about it.

Mr. Metzler: You were probably scared stiff weren't you (laughs)?

Mr. Matthews: He was dressed in his whites, you know. He really looked elegant.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, he's a striking individual when he had all those whites on, tall with the silver hair.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. But he took us down to the hotel and dropped us off and we thanked him profusely. Here was a fleet admiral doing that to a couple of ensigns. That was pretty good.

Mr. Metzler: What was he driving? It was an automobile, not a jeep or anything?

Mr. Matthews: No, it was an automobile.

Mr. Metzler: Like a Packard or Ford or something, you know.

Mr. Matthews: It was a four-door sedan. I really don't know what he was driving but that was my experience with him. I never saw him again, but we did have that one experience. Every now and then I talk to my buddy, who lives in (unclear) North Dakota, and he'll mention how the admiral picked us up.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me, what's your buddy's name again?

Mr. Matthews: Ray Wicklander.

Mr. Metzler: Spell that. Wicklander.

Mr. Matthews: W-i-c-k-l-a-n-d-e-r. Ray Wicklander.

Mr. Metzler: Did you two kind of stay together through the war, or did you split up later, or what?

Mr. Matthews: Oh, we split up later. He went out and I joined an admiral's staff, Admiral Ballantine. First I was at COMFAIR West Coast, learning to be a rocket officer.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, boy. I didn't mean to jump us ahead.

Mr. Matthews: We'll go back.

Mr. Metzler: We'll get to that area, won't we? Okay, so here you are in the Hawaiian Islands, and Nimitz has just dropped you off.

Mr. Matthews: Dropped us off, and we then were transferred down to Maui, and there we did some additional training and we did a lot of night flying and practicing carrier landings again. There were no lights on the runway; they would shine out about like this because the air base there, you could see from land--I mean from

sea--the air base, and they wouldn't allow any lights in case the Japanese were out there.

Mr. Metzler: Right.

Mr. Matthews: So we had to fly in complete darkness until we got around to where we could see these lights and land. I was always glad when that duty was over. But we had, it's kind of interesting, we had some nice cabins that we stayed in, and there were pineapple fields around there. We did have access to a certain amount of cars there, trucks, jeeps, and we kept our--in these cabins we were in, they had closets with shelving in them, and we kept them filled with pineapples.

Mr. Metzler: All the pineapples you can eat, huh?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, and we had to be careful because we sure didn't want to be caught picking them. That was a no-no. But boy, they were good, fresh pineapples.

Mr. Metzler: Sounds good.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, it was. From there, someplace along the line, I did some carrier landings on the Long Island. That was the name of the carrier. I think that could have been back in San Diego.

Mr. Metzler: Which carrier is this?

Mr. Matthews: It was the Long Island.

Mr. Metzler: The Long Island.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. It was a--

Mr. Metzler: It was an escort carrier?

Mr. Matthews: No, I think it was a training carrier used on the Pacific coast. I did carrier landing practice on that, we did. Or it could have been in Hawaii. I don't remember where it was but I did a lot of carrier landing practice on the Long Island. From there, we went down to, and I was stationed on Guadalcanal after we had captured it and we made--

Mr. Metzler: So what'd they do, take you down there on a troop ship, or did you--?

Mr. Matthews: You know, we could have gone down there on the Long Island (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: Of course, you're not with the Sangamon yet, huh?

Mr. Matthews: It's too bad I don't have my flight book with me.

Mr. Metzler: Well, I promised we wouldn't go into detail, so this is not a big deal. I'm just trying to keep the story line, you know, going step by step.

Mr. Matthews: I think I got transferred out of Air Group Three [audio drops out].

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so you got transferred out of Air Group Three while you were in the Hawaiian Islands.

Mr. Matthews: I'm pretty sure that's where it was. And from there, we went down to--I was on Guadalcanal, and there I was with Air Group 26, and we flew on Munda Point. That was one of them, and

then there was one that was further over that we flew and dropped bombs on.

Mr. Metzler: So, you went down to Guadalcanal. We must be in 1943 now.

Mr. Matthews: No, still in '42.

Mr. Metzler: So, you went, okay, okay.

Mr. Matthews: So we went down there and--because we weren't--we couldn't have been at Maui too long. That part of going down there, I just, I just can't remember it.

Mr. Metzler: That's all right.

Mr. Matthews: (Unclear) that's in the south Pacific, but ah--

Mr. Metzler: So, you were in Guadalcanal; so what were you assigned--this air group obviously assigned to an air base somewhere there in--

Mr. Matthews: In Guadalcanal.

Mr. Metzler: After Guadalcanal had been secured.

Mr. Matthews: Secured, right.

Mr. Metzler: I know it took a long time to secure Guadalcanal.

Mr. Matthews: Well, but it was secured--in the summer of '42 we had it, because that's when I was down there. We would bomb on Munda Point, and just do a lot of bombing. One time the plane in front of me, the gunner called the pilot up and told him, he said, "Mr. Matthews, I'm sure is going to be shot down. I never saw so many bullets going into a plane in my life." Not a one of

them hit me, but one did come up and hit the armor plating beside me, and it was a tracer bullet.

Mr. Metzler: What are you flying at this point?

Mr. Matthews: SBDs.

Mr. Metzler: SBDs.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, and it was down in the--

Mr. Metzler: That's the Dauntless, right?

Mr. Matthews: Right.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Matthews: It had flaps that were perforated.

Mr. Metzler: Mesh, almost looking thing, wasn't it?

Mr. Matthews: Well, there were holes in them and it made it perfect for diving. You had good control and so forth. The subsequent planes, replacements, didn't have those holes in the flaps. But he said that, and I didn't get it at all, personally, but I did have one hit my, a tracer, hit the armor plating right beside me, and it landed down in the cockpit and the end of it was still red.

Mr. Metzler: Still (unclear).

Mr. Matthews: Afire, whatever.

Mr. Metzler: What's going through your mind, looking down at your feet at this?

Mr. Matthews: I was glad that it wasn't one that would burst; I forget what they call them. They had some that would explode, and this was just a tracer. When I landed, I--

Mr. Metzler: So, is this from ground fire, or is this from other aircraft?

Mr. Matthews: Ground fire, oh yeah.

Mr. Metzler: It was ground fire, okay.

Mr. Matthews: The Japs were firing up at us. When I got back, I didn't have sense enough to pick that bullet out, and I went back to the base, to some place or another, and I told somebody about it. They said, "Well, you should have picked it up." So I went back and somebody else had picked it up. At least, they said somebody else had. Whoever (unclear) the plane, I don't have the bullet.

Mr. Metzler: You're talking about keeping it as a souvenir?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: Did you feel your aircraft being hit? A big old stable aircraft and--

Mr. Matthews: No, I didn't notice; I didn't know it at all. As far as I personally was concerned, I was--

Mr. Metzler: You didn't feel control change or anything like that?

Mr. Matthews: No, they didn't hit--

Mr. Metzler: Anything important, yeah.

Mr. Matthews: It didn't have any effect on me at all. I never got hit or anything. We did go one time further out and I can't think of the name of



the base that we went out to bomb, but a Japanese Zero was on my tail, and I was down low going as fast as that thing would go, which wasn't too fast.

Mr. Metzler: Not fast enough, that's for sure.

Mr. Matthews: One of our fighters came up and shot him down.

Mr. Metzler: Wow! (Mr. Matthews laughs). That made you feel better, I bet.

Mr. Matthews: Oh, yeah. You bet.

Mr. Metzler: Now this is after you had done your dive and dropped your bomb.

Mr. Matthews: Dropped the bomb and this Zero came along. I think I had this thing up to about 190 knots. I believe that's what; I had the--all the way to the (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: All the way to the metal, huh?

Mr. Matthews: Down low and going like this, and my gunner was--and his name was Meader, M-e-a-d-e-r, he was firing, and maybe he shot him down; I don't know. But one of the pilots told me he did it.

Mr. Metzler: Did you always have the same gunner? I mean, you guys were a pair, huh?

Mr. Matthews: Yes, always the same.

Mr. Metzler: So, was he a good gunner?

Mr. Matthews: As far as I was concerned, he was. I was happy to have him. Nice guy, and that's the only time I recall that we had--that he

had to fire his gun. I don't recall it any other time. He had only fired it if somebody was chasing us like this Zero was.

Mr. Metzler: How many aircraft in your air group their, roughly? I mean give me a sense how large this--

Mr. Matthews: Well, when we went on these bombing runs, there would be, as I recall, it seemed to me like there were around 75 to 100 planes.

Mr. Metzler: That's big; a lot of dive bombers. All of them dive bombers? You've got a complement of aircraft?

Mr. Matthews: Well, we could have had fighters accompanying us. At the time, I'm certain I knew, but when you're doing that, you're flying in formation and so you don't look around too much. Well, they had to be with us because he was in, either an F4F or an F6F and shot this guy down. And this is further on out than Munda Point.

Mr. Metzler: So, Munda Point was your normal target?

Mr. Matthews: That was the closest place that we would fly on.

Mr. Metzler: And that's the place where you took the shells from the ground fire, on a raid to Munda Point?

Mr. Matthews: Yes, Munda Point. Another interesting thing; I don't know whether I should mention it or not, but McElroy--I don't know whether you want this?

Mr. Metzler: I want to hear everything you're willing to say.

Mr. Matthews: Well, we--maybe it was when we were going to this point further on down. We had extra gas tanks on our planes, that you

could release. About halfway there, he couldn't release his, so he excused himself.

Mr. Metzler: Now who is this?

Mr. Matthews: McElroy.

Mr. Metzler: McElroy.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. He excused himself and went back to the base and gave the command to--the squadron--to the skipper, who was another guy; I forget his name. When he got back, he didn't have his bomb with him and he didn't have his extra gas tank; it was gone. He claimed that he dropped his bomb someplace else and that the gas tank fell off when he did it.

Mr. Metzler: What do you think happened?

Mr. Matthews: Well, we figured that he was scared.

Mr. Metzler: I see; just lost courage there, huh?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Dropped it off and went home (unclear).

Mr. Matthews: Went home, but that's what we all figured he did. He was a card, Mr. McElroy was. He later became captain and had his own ship. My understanding is that he fell off of the deck onto the walkway, because he'd been drinking too much.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, my gosh.

Mr. Matthews: (Laughs). He was a card.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. That's giving him the benefit of the doubt, I think. In general, though, you never, in these raids, these bombing runs, most of them--although I guess you had that one time when you had a Zero on your tail. Was there a lot of Japanese aircraft in the air or was it mostly ground fire that you had to contend with?

Mr. Matthews: Mostly ground fire at Munda Point. The only time I ran into the Zeros was when we went on our further. I just can't remember the name of that, and that's the only time we ran into the Zeros. They were scary.

Mr. Metzler: I was going to say, did you guys respect and even fear the Zero as an aircraft? And the Japanese pilots, were they tough opposition?

Mr. Matthews: Well, they were good opposition and they knew how to handle those Zeros. They were good pilots; no doubt about that. About the only time I had any experience with them was that time.

Mr. Metzler: So how long were you on Guadalcanal, would you guess? About six months?

Mr. Matthews: I was overseas six months. Then I came back and I was with ComFair West Coast, and we went to rocket school down at California Institute of Technology. They were instrumental in the firing of rockets and so forth. We learned how they were fired and--

Mr. Metzler: Were you ground based the whole time you were in Guadalcanal? Land based as opposed to--?

Mr. Matthews: Yes, but I was on a carrier too. I was on the Sangamon, and that's where we--where I had some experiences.

Mr. Metzler: And that was before you went back to the states to rocket school and everything?

Mr. Matthews: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Well, tell me what you remember about the Sangamon.

Mr. Matthews: Well, that's where I had my first experience of being shot off a--

Mr. Metzler: Catapult.

Mr. Matthews: Right. And the night before, I worried the whole night about it, because I wanted to make sure I made it.

Mr. Metzler: I guess that's something you can't train for ahead of time either.

Mr. Matthews: Not very well. You do it and that's it. But the only training you get is to keep your head back and--

Mr. Metzler: You're going to get whiplash (laughs).

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, and you watch this guy that's going to set you off. He tells you to twirl up, and you push it up and you take off. You sink down after you go off, and then come up. Well after that first one, it wasn't any problem. I learned to do it.

Mr. Metzler: You don't learn to do it; you do it. You just do it.

Mr. Matthews: They give you some things in case you get lost. One of them--I got lost one time when I was out on patrol--and you have an

expanding square. You go so far this way, this way and this way and I finally found it on the third look; I found it.

Mr. Metzler: You just keep flying in ever larger squares until you can find something that will get you home.

Mr. Matthews: Right. Then one other time, I was out and I told Meader I was going into this cloud up there. I said, "If there's a Japanese sub, maybe we can spot him." I got into the cloud and I found out I can't see. If there was one down below me, I couldn't see it.

Mr. Metzler: It'd be hard to spot, yeah.

Mr. Matthews: So I made a 360, or a 180, and got out of the cloud and we got a message from the boat that we should return. So Meader, well he picked it up on the radio, and he helped to guide us back. He told me to look behind me; I told you this last night. And I looked behind me and we had three of our fighters following us back. I guess they were lost.

Mr. Metzler: They assumed you knew exactly what you were doing (laughs).

Mr. Matthews: They assumed that as (unclear) that we knew how to get back and fortunately we did. I've long remembered that; those three guys back there on my tail.

Mr. Metzler: That would've been embarrassing if you hadn't found your way home.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, there would've been four, five of us in the water, because they didn't any gunners with them. But we made it back and we

never saw any enemy subs. I did see an enemy sub one time; I assumed it was. When we were at Munda Point, we had dropped our bomb and we were forming up to go back. I saw a submarine down in the water and I could have gone down and just shot .50 caliber at it. I didn't know whether it was ours or theirs.

Mr. Metzler: Right.

Mr. Matthews: We hadn't been notified of it and I wasn't going to go down and try to shoot something. It was under the water, and that's what made me think, well maybe we had one there, but it was very close to shore. But I didn't do anything about it. I told them about it when I got back. That was all. I really didn't have too many--

Mr. Metzler: Were most of these sorties off the Sangamon patrols? As opposed to attack on given positions?

Mr. Matthews: Patrols. No, we didn't have any attacks. We had no enemy fleets that we were--

Mr. Metzler: Was she alone out there or were there some others?

Mr. Matthews: We had an escort carrier. The Sangamon, it drafted about 36 feet. It was an oil tanker before, and it was converted. We carried a huge amount of oil and fuel, and we would--

Mr. Metzler: Enough for you and everybody else.

Mr. Matthews: --and our escorts, right. I forget--I know we had one escort because they picked up one of our pilots someplace, and in order to get him back, we had to send over some ice cream.

Mr. Metzler: I've heard these stories of having to supply ice cream and what have you, particularly to the guys on the destroyers who had picked them up.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, right, right. And we had to do that before they'd send him back.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, it's kind of like blackmail (both laugh).

Mr. Matthews: They didn't think so. They thought it was a good idea.

Mr. Metzler: And they couldn't make their own ice cream, so--. Interesting.

Mr. Matthews: And you know, the food aboard a carrier is absolutely excellent.

Mr. Metzler: Is that right?

Mr. Matthews: Oh, yeah, just perfect.

Mr. Metzler: From what I've heard, you know, the pilots and that group kind of kept separate from the crew of the carrier itself, aren't you? Were you even treated a little special?

Mr. Matthews: Well, yeah, I guess so. I was just very pleased and happy. I loved the Navy. It was real good. I actually received an appointment to the regular Navy, and the fact that it came after I was released from service and when I was back home in Kansas City, and I turned it down, because if it had come while I was



still up in Seattle, I would have been a Navy boy all the way through.

Mr. Metzler: Would've been a lifer, huh?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, which would have been a very good life for me. I don't know about Virginia, but it would've been good for me.

Mr. Metzler: Well, it just depends on how much you have to move around, probably, as much as anything. So what caused you, then, to leave the USS Sangamon? Did they pull you out and then send you back to rocket school? How did that happen?

Mr. Matthews: Well, after--when we were on Guadalcanal, there was a question of going home or going to Australia for R&R, and they sent us home.

Mr. Metzler: So after so many hours they give you a leave?

Mr. Matthews: I think we came back home on the Sangamon. That's what we came home on. They would, you know, divert to (unclear) and we came under the Golden Gate.

Mr. Metzler: Into the bay.

Mr. Matthews: Into the bay.

Mr. Metzler: So, is this '43 now, or is this still '42?

Mr. Matthews: That'd be '43. Wait a minute; no.

Mr. Metzler: Still '42?

Mr. Matthews: Still '42.

Mr. Metzler: Okay (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Matthews: (Unclear) '42, and then I went home, went back to Alameda, and remember I got sick with oysters--not oysters, with shrimp.

Mr. Metzler: Food poisoning; is that the thing?

Mr. Matthews: Well, my face swelled.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, you had an allergy.

Mr. Matthews: Allergy. My face swelled up and that's when I first flew an F4F. They didn't have anything, any kind of ships I was used to, so--

Mr. Metzler: Now, the F4F is the Wildcat or the Hellcat?

Mr. Matthews: I'm trying to remember. I think--it's before the F6F. The F6F was the--

Mr. Metzler: I think it was the Hellcat.

Mr. Matthews: Hellcat, (unclear) the Wildcat.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. I flew--we had to, in order to keep our hand in, we flew those--.

Mr. Metzler: This was just to keep you sharp, huh?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. That was supposed to have a built-in ground loop, because it had such a narrow landing gear. So I was extremely careful when I came in to land and the guy in front of me did have a ground loop, so it made me even more cautious.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me what you mean by a ground loop. You just do the spin around, once you--

Mr. Matthews: Spin around, yeah. He didn't--he lost control.

Mr. Metzler: Once you land.

Mr. Matthews: Right. Just on the runway. There were four of us there. We were going to be reassigned to the rocket school deal, and I got Seattle and so I went up to Seattle, and well, first I went to Inyokern. All four of us were at Inyokern.

Mr. Metzler: Where's that?

Mr. Matthews: That's in the desert in California, not too far from Mojave.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Matthews: The Navy had a base there, and they had another base that they built; I can't think of the name of it, but I never went over there. I stayed there and that's where I was learning the rockets.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about the rocket school. What's the concept here/

Mr. Matthews: Well, we had to learn about flying rockets, and then we were to be shipped off to different points and we would train squadrons going out overseas.

Mr. Metzler: So these are under-the-wing rockets, on airplanes?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, under the--yeah. They weren't big like the rockets today. We went to our respective place, we'd have to find someplace where we could build a rocket field, where they could come and fly, and we'd have to lecture to them about what they were supposed to do and how they were supposed to do it. For example, one time we had a bombing plane, they were Lockheeds, made by Lockheed; I forget the name of them.

Well, they couldn't go into a steep dive. As I recall, ten to fifteen degrees was the most they could go. They couldn't go any more than that; they weren't built for it. So we had to caution them on that and they would go in to--they would shoot their rockets, and it was--

Mr. Metzler: So, were the rockets considered the wave of the future and were going to revolutionize everything? What was the tone?

Mr. Matthews: They thought so at the time, but then they got into much more advanced rocket. At that time it was a rocket that you aimed with your airplane, and you'd fire it off and it wasn't a big heavy rocket, but it could have a warhead on it that would explode on--

Mr. Metzler: Basically a self-propelled bomb is what it was.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, but you know, it wasn't too big. It wasn't much bigger around than this cup.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, so maybe a couple-three inches in diameter, something like that.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, that's all. Right. With a head on it.

Mr. Metzler: Right.

Mr. Matthews: They had a propellant in there that--they showed us that they had--they put little patches of something on this propellant to help it burn properly so that it didn't go up in one spot too much. They would fire off; they'd go off in a hurry. I wouldn't have wanted to have one hit me. I don't recall them having an

explosive head on them, but they probably did, but not (unclear) in our training because there was no need for that. That would've been more expensive. I went to ComFair Seattle and ultimately over to, in Washington, Pasco. Pasco, Washington and built the bombing school over there. The Navy had a base there and we had to build a bombing school, the bombing site, rather. The squadrons would come in and we would lecture to them. I had two or three guys on my staff.

Mr. Metzler: What are you, still an ensign at this point?

Mr. Matthews: No, I was a full lieutenant.

Mr. Metzler: A full lieutenant, okay.

Mr. Matthews: I guess at some point in time I was a lieutenant (j.g.) and then I left as a full lieutenant. That's about it, except--

Mr. Metzler: What kind of issues did you run into when you were an instructor at this rocket bombing school? I mean, was that easy work for you or boring or--?

Mr. Matthews: No, I didn't think it was boring because we had to go out there and we would be with these guys and answer questions for them.

Mr. Metzler: These are all the young pups that are still in training, or are these old grizzled veterans and you're just teaching them rockets or what?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, they're already in a squadron, and they were through basic training and so forth. It was up to us to try to teach them how to

shoot the rockets so they could hit their target. We had targets out there, and we had ground crew that would pinpoint where each rocket hit.

Mr. Metzler: So these guys are flying aircraft equipped with the rockets, and then they're shooting them and then you're grading them on whether they hit the targets or not?

Mr. Matthews: Right. Mainly, we had just a few of them that were these ones made by Lockheed. The rest of them were combat planes that could land on carriers, like F6Fs.

Mr. Metzler: And could do steeper dives.

Mr. Matthews: Oh, yeah. The dive bombers, of course, they could come in--I'm trying to think--

Mr. Metzler: Did they put these rockets on dive bombers as well? Do you remember?

Mr. Matthews: I'm sure they did. Yeah. We had bomber pilots there. I'm trying to think if there were SBC, SB--wait a minute--SB2Cs or if they were the ones like I flew, Douglas Dauntless.

Mr. Metzler: SB2C was the later generation dive bomber. Was that the Douglas--?

Mr. Matthews: (Talking at the same time as Mr. Metzler). Later generation, and they had some trouble with it.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, it didn't have a good reputation, from what I remember.

Mr. Matthews: The tail would fall off of it.

Mr. Metzler: Not good.

Mr. Matthews: No. I don't remember those being there. The only thing I can remember is, although it seems like when I was overseas that I remember reading in an ALNAV that they had put out about SB2Cs losing their (unclear) tail.

Mr. Metzler: How long were you in the rocket training role?

Mr. Matthews: Well, that was from the fall of 1942 until I got out of the service, I guess.

Mr. Metzler: Which was when?

Mr. Matthews: November of '45.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so you were doing that rocket bit for three years.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. That was quite a while.

Mr. Metzler: You trained a lot of guys.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. Well, we started out at Inyokern and all four of us were at Inyokern.

Mr. Metzler: Can you spell Inyokern for the people who are going to transcribe this? This is a spelling test (laughs).

Mr. Matthews: I-n--Inyokern--I-n-y-o-k-e-r-n.

Mr. Metzler: I figured that's one they'd struggle with.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. Well, it's a city in the Mojave Desert.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Matthews: There were four of us, one of them went to Arcata, up on the coast of northern California; one went to Palm Springs, down around Palm Springs; another one, where'd he go?

Mr. Metzler: And you were in Pasco?

Mr. Matthews: Well, no, I went to ComFair Seattle. I was stationed in Seattle but I was to set up a bomber base or a--

Mr. Metzler: Training.

Mr. Matthews: Training place in Pasco.

Mr. Metzler: Pasco, right.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. That was good duty.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. Seattle's a pretty nice place.

Mr. Matthews: I had--Jimmy Newell was our skipper there. He was a full commander and he was my boss, immediate boss. He was a corker.

Mr. Metzler: How's that?

Mr. Matthews: Well, he was a feisty guy. He was, well he was just a good guy.

Mr. Metzler: You had a lot of respect for him, I take it?

Mr. Matthews: You betcha. You bet I did; a good family man and he was--the people who were under him, he was good to them, very good to them. You couldn't have asked for a better guy. He let you do what you had to do, with no problem there.

Mr. Metzler: In that three-year period, did the technology and the techniques of rocketry and what have you expand, change, evolve. That's a



long period of time during a war, and a brand new technology coming in.

Mr. Matthews: Well, I think they gave it up for--no, no they didn't give it up, because I was trying to put in a rocket base down on the coast of Oregon. I went down there and found out that it wouldn't be possible because of the shifting sands. You'd put it on the sand on the beach and so forth, it would--the wind would shift the sand so much that you just couldn't keep a target there for them to fire at. So we did have one out of--I'm trying to think--it's up on the northeastern coast of Oregon.

Mr. Metzler: I wanted to pick up on something I heard you say. You said you felt like they'd kind of given up on the rocket, the rocketry. What do you mean by that?

Mr. Matthews: Well I think they had advanced to the point where those rockets weren't of use anymore. For example, during--one time I was down at San Diego, this is while I was still at Inyokern, and they had a rocket assist plane. I saw it take off.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, really?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. That was the first time I'd ever seen it and he would--that guy almost went straight up with that rocket assist.

Mr. Metzler: Right!

Mr. Matthews: So they--let's see, I ended the war; I was in Seattle and I was still going over to Pasco. I'd fly over there about once a week

and stay there. I'd stay there for a week, came home on the weekend.

Mr. Metzler: It kind of seemed like they were giving up on the rockets.

Mr. Matthews: It seems to me that that's what they were doing.

Mr. Metzler: It didn't work out like they thought it would.

Mr. Matthews: No, they weren't--well, they didn't have enough power and I guess they figured that the war was coming to an end also, you know, with those atomic bombs that they dropped.

Mr. Metzler: Do you remember when the war ended? Not the date but what you were doing when you found out about it?

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, I was in Seattle.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about that.

Mr. Matthews: Well, Virginia was--my wife was on Mount Rainier with some friends.

Mr. Metzler: Was she a mountain climber or what?

Mr. Matthews: Oh, no, no, no, no. No, they were just up there someplace with some friends.

Mr. Metzler: Recreation.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, just for the day. I was just in Seattle; I remember that the war ended and I came home. I don't remember--

Mr. Metzler: So there weren't any huge parties? You don't remember any?

Mr. Matthews: Oh, no, no. I didn't go to any parties about the war ending.

Mr. Metzler: Just a big sigh of relief that maybe you could get back to a normal life now.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. I do remember one time that we were having a get-together. I guess it was at the officers' club on the base there in Seattle, at Sand Point. The movie actor Robert Taylor came, and he introduced himself to us, and he went over and sat down next to my wife (laughs). Well, you just can't imagine what kind of a movie throb he was to the general public.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, he was. He was a big number back then.

Mr. Matthews: You betcha. He sat down next to her and I'll never forget it. I'd just see her heart pounding, you know (laughs) with Robert Taylor sitting down next to her. And I got a big kick out of it (laughs). Virginia looked a lot different then, just like I did. She was a very pretty girl, and I thought that--

Mr. Metzler: You didn't think you were going to lose her to him, did you?

Mr. Matthews: Oh, no, no. No, no way, but I figured he picked her to sit down next to, and he was smart; he picked the prettiest girl there as far as I was concerned.

Mr. Metzler: Well yeah, yeah. You might have been slightly prejudiced but that's okay.

Mr. Matthews: He was there; he had done something, narrated something, the enchanted lady or--

Mr. Metzler: A movie of some sort.

Mr. Matthews: A Navy movie about a carrier. I can't--something like that. So he was going around and visiting various Navy bases. He was a nice guy, you know, didn't act smart. He came up and introduced himself to me; I didn't go to him. He said he was Robert Taylor and that's about all I remember of it.

Mr. Metzler: So, the war was over, and were you released from the Navy? It seemed like you said earlier they tried to talk you into staying on.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, I had a letter from the Admiral. I put in for regular Navy through Admiral Ballantine.

Mr. Metzler: Who was Admiral Ballantine again?

Mr. Matthews: He was ComFair Seattle. He was the chief admiral up there. His admiral's writer told me that he had never seen such a nice recommendation for somebody to become a member of the regular Navy. I thought, well gee, that's nice; maybe I'll make it. But then--I put in for it quite a while before the war was over, and no answer had come back, so I was released from the Navy and when I got home, I got a letter from some Navy office in Seattle--or Chicago--telling me that I had been accepted to the regular Navy. But I'd been home and--

Mr. Metzler: Home at the time was Kansas City?

Mr. Matthews: Kansas City, right. And sitting on the porch and, you know, just--

Mr. Metzler: Enjoying civilian life again.

Mr. Matthews: And so I talked it over with Virginia and decided, well, I won't do it, because I'd have to move around every so often, and so I didn't do it. I turned them down. In retrospect why, it's a sad day in my life; I wish I'd have done it. I would've been--well, I'd have had a good life; I had a good life otherwise, but I'd have had a very good life in the Navy. I'd have been in the Korean War, I guess, and all those other wars (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, and all the other wars, too.

Mr. Matthews: Vietnam. I was surprised I was never called back like the baseball player for the Boston Red Sox. He was called back.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, Ted Williams.

Mr. Matthews: Ted Williams. But they never called me back, so that was that.

Mr. Metzler: So, what do you figure was the toughest moment in your career there, during World War II? I mean, when you were the most, either concerned or depressed or down, or outright scared or whatever? The low point.

Mr. Matthews: Well, I was never down. You know you're young and you don't figure that there's anything that can bother you. When I went out on these bombing runs, I figured that I was coming back. That's your feeling.

Mr. Metzler: Probably a good feeling to have, too; otherwise you're looking over your shoulder all the time.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, I was not scared. When I'd go on those bombing runs, I'd dive down; I enjoyed diving and I suppose the most scared time was when I was in basic training and those guys are doing snap rolls in these Yellow Perils, and I had to do those and slow rolls. Those things scared me because I just hadn't done those kind of things. That's I would say would be the low point, but once I learned to do them, then that was fine. In order to get your wings, the last thing you do when we were in Miami is that your check pilot would be on the ground and you'd be up in the air, and you had to go through all these things. I got a good score; the only thing he said is that I scooped out on my slow roll a little bit. So I think out of a possible four, I got a 3.6 or something like that, so I felt pretty good.

Mr. Metzler: You got your wings, though.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, I got my wings.

Mr. Metzler: What was the lightest moment of the whole time? I mean, you know, when you think back and kind of chuckle or think of some of the silly things you and your buddies did or anything like that.

Mr. Matthews: Well, we used to, when we were on Guadalcanal, if you wanted to go swimming you went bare naked, because there were no women on the island, at least that we knew of. You'd go over to the shore, the water, and you'd swim in the ocean. Those were kind of light moments, walking around in the nude like that.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, a nudist beach.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, that's what it was (both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: You can say you were at a nudist beach.

Mr. Matthews: Yes, that's right. I was happy, a happy guy during the war. I enjoyed the Navy; I was wholeheartedly a Navy man, and still am. I like to watch these things, these war pictures about the Navy and so forth. It makes me wish I were back in it.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. How do you feel about the Japanese after all these years?

Mr. Matthews: Oh, the people are good; the Japanese today had nothing to do with World War II. I don't segregate the people; they're all the same to me. Nice people, that's the way I look at it. I don't care who they are, they're nice. So I have no ill feelings toward them at all; probably I did at some point back then.

Mr. Metzler: Well, I guess everybody did back then because they were the enemy, huh? It seems to stick with some people and other people not so, and a lot of it has to do, I guess, with what their experience was.

Mr. Matthews: Well, when I was on Pearl Harbor, they had Japanese barbers, girls. They cut our hair; they didn't cut our neck so, no, I don't have any ill feeling towards anybody, except the Arabs, the way they're getting so much money for our gasoline. That I don't like. But no, everybody's a nice person to me unless they prove otherwise. That's the way I feel.

Mr. Metzler: Well, what else can we get down on tape here about your World War II experiences while I've got you live and kicking here?

Mr. Matthews: Well, let's see. I can't--oh, when I was at Inyokern, I was flying TBFs, like the one you have over here. You know, I don't remember how I got it, because I always flew SBDs, but I had a TBF. These are some interesting things. One time I was coming in to land and they only had a runway that kind of ran, as I recall, southwest to northeast, and there was a tremendous crosswind. I just didn't feel like I wanted to come in on that crosswind and land, because too many things can happen. So they had a short runway that didn't seem like it was much longer than this room here. You've seen the TBF over there? Well, that's a big airplane.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, it is.

Mr. Matthews: As a matter of fact, it was known then as the largest airplane in the world that still had a (unclear) stick rather than a steering wheel. Well, I decided that I was going to land on this, not on the runway, but on this cross--they have a name for it--and it was very short. With the wind, I could land right into the wind with it, and I had to go right over the barracks. I always felt that I was a pretty good pilot, not cocky or anything, but just a good pilot. I put that baby just like you were going to land on a carrier and I had it all set and I went right over and landed right



at the end of that strip and stopped it almost, well I didn't have to use all of this little cross--

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, this connecting type of cross runway.

Mr. Matthews: Right, I didn't have to use--

Mr. Metzler: You didn't even need it all, huh?

Mr. Matthews: No. The tower called me up and said, "Nice landing."  
(Laughs).

Mr. Metzler: I bet that made you feel good.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: What did the guys in the barracks say, I wonder, when you went over at about ten feet? (Laughs).

Mr. Matthews: Well, I don't know. Well, of course I was--the TBF had a strange thing, to me. The first time I went in to land, I was going in, and the SBD never did this, but the TBF, once you got it to a certain speed, it would sink down like that. The first time that happened, to me, I thought, boy, what's happened? But it was just the position that it would assume so that you could go in and land properly. So I had it in that position when I went over those barracks. Then another thing I did was--Inyokern is quite isolated and there were people in there that wanted to go home every now and then on a weekend. I remember one guy wanted to go to Santa Barbara and another guy wanted to go down to Alhambra. He said, "There's a little airstrip down there." And

so they asked me if I would take them in the TBF. I wasn't supposed to, I suppose, but I did. I'd pile them in there, and first we went to Santa Barbara and I landed there and he got out, and I went to Alhambra and the guys got out there, and then I came back home. I thought I was doing something good for the morale; the Navy probably wouldn't have liked it too well, for the gas I was using and so forth. But I was making the personnel happy and I didn't mind doing it.

Mr. Metzler: Matthews Airlines (laughs).

Mr. Matthews: Yeah. Virginia was in Kansas City at the time.

Mr. Metzler: So it wasn't like you were away from home or anything doing all this.

Mr. Matthews: No, I was just doing that for them. They made their way back; I didn't go back.

Mr. Metzler: You didn't go back and give them a round trip, huh?

Mr. Matthews: No, they made it back. I just thought it would be nice to do that. I never did have that feeling that, because I'm an officer, that these under me; they were nice people. We had one by the name of Shorty that, when Virginia came to Inyokern, he took a rocket box and made a bed for our daughter who was only a couple of months old. He made that for her without me asking. That's the relationship I liked.

Mrs. Matthews: (Unclear).

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, we had it fixed up nice.

Mr. Metzler: You fixed it up right.

Mr. Matthews: I always felt that the enlisted people were people just like I'm a person, and that way, you get along with them.

Mr. Metzler: Well, let me close the interview now, unless you've got something else that pops into your mind.

Mr. Matthews: No, I don't think so.

Mr. Metzler: Let me close it then by thanking you for what you did for our country during World War II. I still think we don't thank you guys enough, and so I just want to make sure I get that down on tape. We do appreciate what you did.

Mr. Matthews: Well, I appreciate what you said. I'm sorry that I can't think of any more detail, but time has passed.

Mr. Metzler: It's been a few years.

Mr. Matthews: There is one thing that I might mention about being in the south Pacific. I guess I was on some island there. There were a lot of scarcities here at home: pineapples, things of that nature. They had barges loaded with pineapples and all different kinds of fresh fruits that you couldn't get at home, and they had them parked out in the water so that people couldn't get to them. The Navy guys would swim out and get as many cans as they could carry and take them back to shore. Of course, they weren't

supposed to do that, but that's the way we could get some fresh fruit and so forth in abundance.

Mr. Metzler: Right!

Mr. Matthews: And then, when gasoline was so scarce, we had these tankers sitting around down there in the south Pacific, loaded with gasoline, and no place to put it.

Mr. Metzler: It's almost like they had more than they need in some areas.

Mr. Matthews: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: While the home front was, you know, not getting everything they needed.

Mr. Matthews: They'd just sit there, sometimes months they'd sit there because there was no place to put it. They had all the reserves, tanks and so forth, filled up. I always looked--I never did swim out and get any of that fruit, but some other guys did. They finally had to put a guard (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: To guard the fruit (both laugh).

Mr. Matthews: It was very interesting, the way they did that. And then, when you were down there you had to take this pill for malaria.

Mr. Metzler: Right. I was wondering if you had any problems with tropical diseases.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, when we went to Guadalcanal, I guess we went to Guadalcanal off of the carrier because the doctor gave us shots for some disease; I forget.

Mr. Metzler: Dengue fever or malaria?

Mr. Matthews: No, not malaria; there's another one. My arm swelled up huge.

Mr. Metzler: Oooh, from the shot.

Mr. Matthews: From the shot, and he told me that it wasn't anything; it'd go away. It did. We'd take Atabrine, and the stuff was terrible. We'd wrap it in bread crumbs and take it that way, so you didn't taste it on the way down. Every now and then you'd have to have a penicillin shot for some reason or other; I don't remember why. I do remember that the medic, and I was there, was giving one in the guy's buttocks (laughs), he slapped him real hard and stuck the needle in, because the needle was a big needle in those days.

Mr. Metzler: A horse needle, we used to call it (laughs).

Mr. Matthews: So it didn't hurt.

Mr. Metzler: No, it already hurt, so you didn't notice it when the metal went in. Holy mackerel!

Mr. Matthews: My days in the Navy were, as far as I was concerned, were very good; it's a very good life.

Mr. Metzler: Well, it sounds like it.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, oh, I enjoyed it.

Mrs. Matthews: You even considered staying.

Mr. Matthews: Yeah, oh well.

Mr. Metzler: That's water under the bridge. (Unclear). Well, I'm going to shut this down. Thanks again for spending the time with us today. We do appreciate it.

OH02505 - Richard Matthews  
Transcribed by: Joel Keefer  
Fredericksburg, TX  
May 22, 2017