

***National Museum of the Pacific War***

***Center for Pacific War Studies***

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Jack Puryear**

**Navy Fleet Aerial Photo Squadron One**

Date of Interview: July 13, 2009

**Mr. Franklin:** This is Michael Franklin and today is July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009 and I am interviewing Mr. Jack Puryear at his home in Austin, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War and the Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. To start out with, where and when were you born?

**Mr. Puryear:** I was born on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1923 in Beaumont, Texas.

**Mr. Franklin:** What were your parents' names?

**Mr. Puryear:** Ida Lee Pitman Puryear, and Onie Mayes Puryear.

**Mr. Franklin:** Did you have any siblings?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yes, I had one brother that was 19 years older than I am, and I had a sister that was 10 years older, and I had another sister that's about 6 years older, and another brother that was 3 years older. So I had two brothers and two sisters.

**Mr. Franklin:** You all had quite the difference in age.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, it's kind of a wide spread in age. (Laughs) My oldest brother was at Texas A&M when I was born and he called my mother and said "I wanna name that new baby." So, he was the one who named me.

**Mr. Franklin:** Did he name you after anyone specific?

**Mr. Puryear:** Well, yeah. My middle name is Martin. Jack Martin Puryear. Martin was the old family doctor who delivered all of us and remained our family doctor all the time we were living in Beaumont for many years.

**Mr. Franklin:** Did you go to school in Beaumont?

**Mr. Puryear:** I did. I went to Fletcher Grade School, Crockett Middle School, and Beaumont High School. And then, after that, I went to junior college in Beaumont, which

at that time was called Lamar Junior College. Now it's Lamar University, a four year school. But back in those days it was just a two year college.

**Mr. Franklin:** Were you in school when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yes, and you remember so well when you heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We were at a weekend lodge up in Woodville, Texas when we heard the announcement. And that was in '41, so I was in my first year at Lamar Junior College.

**Mr. Franklin:** You were in year one of your two year term.

**Mr. Puryear:** Right.

**Mr. Franklin:** When did you enlist in the Armed Services? Was it something that you wanted to do directly after that?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yes, and, of course, all of us were ready to go and defend our country. My brother was one of the first draftees from Beaumont. He was drafted and went straight to New Guinea. He was one of the first guys on New Guinea. So I joined the V5 program, Naval Air V5, in October of '42 and was called into service in March or April of '43. Then I went directly to the San Diego Naval Training Station as an enlisted man, but I stayed in Naval Aviation. From San Diego boot camp I went to Pensacola, Florida. I had the option of staying in Naval Air so I chose Aerial Photography as what I wanted to do in the Naval Air. So they have a really good naval photography school in Pensacola, Florida to do basic photography and those that went into Aerial photography took additional training.

**Mr. Franklin:** What interested you in Naval Aviation? Was the branch that you wanted to join?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yes I did. I thought that I could be a pilot and land on those aircraft carriers but my eyesight failed me and I couldn't line up that flight deck with that airplane. (Laughs) You know, you take these tests for depth perception and the first time that I took it I passed with flying colors, but the next time I took it I had developed a stigmatism and I could not line up those two stakes right down that hallway and I lost my depth perception.

**Mr. Franklin:** So you never got to even begin pilots training.

**Mr. Puryear:** No, and that's the reason why I had to go in as an enlisted man, but stayed on as some type of Naval Aviation; mechanics, or radio, but I chose photography. I was interested in photography back in those days.

**Mr. Franklin:** So your training is in Pensacola, Florida for Aerial photography. What kind of training did you do for that?

**Mr. Puryear:** Well, they teach you basic photography first; the cameras, doing ground photography, how to develop films, how to enlarge photographs, all phases of photography in a six month period. It is very good, very interesting. They had all of the latest equipment available and it's a good school, a good basic photography school. Then I had to go through, I think, two months of aerial photography; flying in S and Js with a pilot and shooting targets out of the back hatch of an S and J, and bringing the film in, developing it, you know, and how to use aerial photographs. And then from there I went to Washington D.C. and had three month training in (stumbles on word) lithography. Ah! I can't say it right. Lithography! (Laughs)

**Mr. Franklin:** Lithography.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah lithography, which was a big thing back in those days because reproduction of photographs and such, a lot of it was done by lithography. And then a short course in photo interpretation. But while in Washington D.C. I got yellow fever and had to stay in the hospital for a couple of weeks. So when the rest of the guys left and spread out to different places in the world to do photography with the Navy I was by myself when I went from Washington D.C. to San Diego. But it was nice being by myself because I got a berth aboard that train. Usually on troop trains you sit up all night, you know, but I had the privilege of having a berth on that train.

**Mr. Franklin:** So you didn't get to ship over with the people you trained with?

**Mr. Puryear:** Well they all dispersed. They went to different places, you know. My orders when I left Washington D.C. were to report to San Diego, North Island Naval Air Base. I was to report to Bomber Squadron 200. And my crew was part of that Bomber Squadron 200, but it was a photographic plane. It wasn't a bomber, you know. But we used their facilities; the hanger, the classroom, and everything for learning to fly the, it was actually a B-24. The Navy called it a PB4Y1. A four engine Liberator is what it was, because all of our cameras were installed in the bomb bay.

So we trained for two months in San Diego and then we got our orders to fly to Guadalcanal as a replacement aircraft for Fleet Aerial Photo Squadron One, which was already out on Guadalcanal for the early part of the war. And it was an eight plane squadron. Actually, it started out as a nine plane squadron and two of them were shot down. So we were the first replacement crew to bring it back up to eight planes. We had nine, lost two, and then we showed up so they had eight. Eight photo planes.

**Mr. Franklin:** So with the photo reconnaissance plane, what were your missions primarily like? You went, I would assume, before any bombing took place.

**Mr. Puryear:** Well, in some instances yes, but in other instances the main job was to prepare mosaic maps. Mosaic maps are photographs that overlap each other and give you a complete aerial view of an island. And it's flown usually two weeks prior to the invasion. Like, the whole squadron left Guadalcanal for the mission to film and make the mosaic maps for the invasions of Guam, Saipan, and Tinian. So, like over Guam, four of our planes were flying "on wing", so many centimeters apart . . . or so many miles apart. Anyhow, they were separated! And you fly over the island 20,000 feet, straight and level, and my photographs through the island would overlap 40 percent with the plane next to me. And then the plane next to him would overlap 40 percent. And then our photographs that we took would overlap each other 40 percent so that when you got back you developed the film, laid out on a big board, and there's a complete photograph of the island below you. So four of the planes did Guam and the other four planes did Saipan and Tinian on that same day and then returned to Guadalcanal where the films were processed and the mosaic maps were made. But, if we were not making mosaic maps we were still flying all the time. That's the main mission; that's a big mission. The other missions were all the bypassed islands that the Japs were holding. We kept reconnaissance on those. And we would fly with the Jolly Rogers, the B-26s, or the Corsairs. That squadron of Corsairs, they would go with us and while they were strafing or bombing, we'd be up there. Let's see, what's the name of this squadron right here? Squadron 17. That was a really great Corsair squadron.

**Mr. Franklin:** Would you be in the B-24, or the PB4Y, while you were with those fighter squadrons?

**Mr. Puryear:** Right. You know, they were much faster than us, so we'd take off and get part of the way to the target and then here would come the Corsairs or the B-26s and they would join us. And then we would both get to the island or the target at the same time. Now, the Jap fighters would go after *them* because they knew what they were gonna do. They were gonna bomb them or strafe them. They saw us up there and they figured out that we were photo planes, you know, and they didn't come after us.

**Mr. Franklin:** So, basically, they served as a deflection as well?

**Mr. Puryear:** Right. Absolutely. We did that all through the war, up to where we were photographing Tokyo. B-29s would go with us.

**Mr. Franklin:** It seems like a photo survey mission would actually be pretty dangerous, so it's pretty important for you to keep a tight formation then.

**Mr. Puryear:** Oh yeah, right. It depends. If we were doing mosaic maps we had to stay in position. Anti-aircraft fire, that's how we lost two planes, you know. Anti-aircraft fire knocked down two of them because to go straight and level, they pick you up. And really, I was told that our squadron was formed by Fleet Admiral Nimitz. Photo became more and more important during the war and the way I heard, early on in the war that Nimitz requested the formation of this Fleet Air Photo Squadron One. It was a new kind of an experiment, really.

**Mr. Franklin:** Would they attach you to an existing Air Force that was in the Pacific?

**Mr. Puryear:** Not really. It was an independent squadron, but we were under the Seventh Fleet at the time.

**Mr. Franklin:** Okay. So you were attached to the Navy.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. And, like on Guadalcanal, our airstrip was one of those old metal airstrips, you know, and when you landed on it it would clank all over the place. But Bull Halsey, Admiral Halsey, was on Guadalcanal at that time. And he was a great guy. He came by our squadron a couple of times to have his picture taken for some reason. And then one time I heard a friend of mine was down at the Mail headquarters on Guadalcanal. He wrote me a note. I got a letter from home and he had attached a note to it that said:

*Puryear, I'm here at the Post Office. Come down and see me.*

So I went over to the maintenance barn and checked out a jeep and I was driving, it was just old dirt roads, gravel roads from our squadron to Henderson Field down there where the Post Office was located, and I had a flat tire. I got out of the jeep, got back there and there was no spare on the jeep. So I was standing there. I looked up and saw the dust flying and here came a grey Plymouth with an Admirals flags on the front bumper. And I said, "Oh my gosh, there's Admiral Halsey coming!" and he stopped right there. He said "Hey mate, you have a problem?"

I said, "Yes sir, I got a flat tire."

He said, "Jump in."

So he took me and drove me down to Henderson Field, to the maintenance barn there and he says, "Guys, take this sailor back. He's got a flat tire. Fix it for him." (Laughs)

And going, driving down there, Halsey was so nice. He wanted to know who I was, where I was from, how long I was in the Navy, you know. He was just a real great guy.

Of course he was on Guadalcanal for quite some time and if you heard much history



you'll recall that he and General MacArthur had some differences back at that time. Finally MacArthur said, "Well you know, Halsey knows what he's talking about." And he talked Halsey into giving him a small Fleet to be MacArthur's Fleet for support, for some landings and such. So anyhow, they got together and everything turned out real good. But everybody loved Halsey; everybody on that Island.

**Mr. Franklin:** That was a pretty great encounter with Halsey!

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, it really was.

**Mr. Franklin:** So back to while you were doing reconnaissance missions, how much was anti-aircraft fire an issue?

**Mr. Puryear:** It depended on the island. Like Truk, we used to keep track of Truk. We'd send a plane up there about two or three times a week to keep track of what they were doing. And what was the other island? We used to fly the slot between the Admiralties and New Guinea, in that area where there was a heavy Japanese fortified island. That's where Admiral . . . when we shot down Admiral Yamamoto. You know about that story? Well, Admiral Yamamoto came down to the South Pacific to help the morale of the troops. So, he went to, oh heck, what was the name of that island?

**Mr. Franklin:** It was Iwo Jima wasn't it?

**Mr. Puryear:** No. It was way south, down near Guadalcanal. See, I've got it here somewhere. (Goes through book on the table) Let's see. This is the slot through here. Poole was one of theirs. That's where we got shot up the worst. Right there. There and Kyushu. But anyhow, Admiral Yamamoto flew down here and spent a few days. You know we had broken their code. So we found out exactly when he arrived, how long he was going to stay, and what time he was going to take off to return to Japan. He and

another Admiral was with him. They were in two Betty aircraft. And we broke the code. We knew exactly what time he left. He left the island, and I'm trying to think of the name. I've got it here somewhere.

**Mr. Franklin:** One of the Admiralty Islands?

**Mr. Puryear:** No. It was down near New Guinea. Let's see. Where did I just see that? I think it's going to be here. (Paper ruffles)

**Mr. Franklin:** This is Admiral Yamamoto who led the invasion Fleet against Pearl Harbor?

**Mr. Puryear:** That's right. Yeah, and he said "We've just awoken a giant." But anyhow, you know, when we found out that Yamamoto was going to fly back to Japan, Halsey said, "You know, we ought to get him." But he said, "I'm not going to make the decision. I'm gonna talk to Admiral Nimitz."

So he went to Nimitz and Nimitz said, "Well, you know, Yamamoto is such a great guy." Everybody respected him because, well, he studied in the United States at one time. And everybody liked him personally. And so Nimitz said, "Well, I better ask Admiral King." And Admiral King wouldn't make the decision so he passed it on to President Truman. And the message went to President Truman: "Should we get him or not?" And Truman's short message back through the chain said "Good hunting, boys."

**Mr. Franklin:** (Laughs) and that's it?!

**Mr. Puryear:** That's it. So it got back to Halsey and seventeen P-38s took off from Bougainville and Guadalcanal. They joined up and they hit the two Bettys, and I think they had seventeen Zeroes with them. And so they went in, shot down all the Zeroes, and then shot down the two Bettys. And the other Admiral, who was later the Japanese

Admiral in the Philippines, I can't think of his name offhand but anyhow, he survived because his plane went down in the water; in the ocean. Yamamoto's plane went down in the jungle. Of course, everybody was killed in that plane. But the other Admiral landed in the water not too far off of one of the Japanese held islands and they rescued them. I didn't see it, but they said that the P-38s came back in from that mission, made the victory roll, and said it was impressive. (Laughs)

**Mr. Franklin:** So this would have been in April or May of '45?

**Mr. Puryear:** You know, I don't remember that date. I can't tell you just what that date was. I wish I had that. But I'm sure that the museum has it.

**Mr. Franklin:** Now, were you stationed primarily on Guadalcanal, or as the Fleet moved closer and closer to Japan, did your squadron move as well?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yes, but the interesting thing about New Guinea and Bougainville was, see, here we were on Guadalcanal. Bougainville was pretty close and about the time that we as a replacement crew got to Guadalcanal, the Bettys and the Zeroes were just ending their flights over Guadalcanal. We only went through several nights of harassment by a few Zeroes and a few Bettys and all the P-38s that we had finally stopped all the Bettys and the Zeroes from coming in to harass and bomb Guadalcanal. So, with Bougainville, we invaded Bougainville and took that island. And in the process of taking that island the General in charge of the occupation and the landing occupation of Bougainville, that island was such thick jungle that he says, "We can't spot . . . we need aerial photography to spot where the Japanese Army is back there in all that forest."

**Mr. Franklin:** And it wasn't a big island, either, was it?

**Mr. Puryear:** Well, no. So, one of our planes flew up there. And what we did was we moved a portable lab up to one of the islands that we already had, and one of our planes went up and did low altitude runs over the enemy held part of Bougainville. And then they came back to where we had the portable lab set up, processed the film, and printed and then went back to Bougainville and dropped those photographs to the marines on Bougainville. And the photographs definitely showed where the Japanese troops were, and where their heavy armament was, where their tanks were, and so that's what really sped up the capture and securing of Bougainville. And there's an airstrip there. Not a very good one. But then we used that as an advanced base to do the Admiralty Islands and such. And there's a little island here off of New Guinea called Wakde. So they made the decision that they were going to invade Palau. Which was a bad decision, I think. My brother down here had already been wounded twice. He moved up here and he his . . . part of the 49<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, I forgot the number.

**Mr. Franklin:** He was in an armored division?

**Mr. Puryear:** No. He was just a foot soldier. Infantry. And they took the little Island of Wakde because we had to have that if we were gonna fly to Palau. We couldn't fly all the way from Guadalcanal to Palau and back, but we could fly from Wakde to Palau and back. And also, the B-26s could do that. So right after they took it we flew up there. We had four planes and we flew over Palau trying to get the reconnaissance for the landing there. And it was bad. We got shot up. And my plane didn't get hit but we lost our navigational equipment so the squadron got dispersed because so many fighters were after us, plus the anti-aircraft and the fighters. So we started back. We thought we were headed this way, but we didn't know because of damage to the plane. And we really

started going this way and we were sending out S.O.S. And all of a sudden we contacted, what did they call the Aussie shore spotters? I can't remember what we called them. Anyhow, he's an individual with a radio station. And even though Japan occupied all of New Guinea back here, all of this part, he was here. His base itself and six native helpers were right there and he picked up our distress signal.

He said, "I gotcha. What's your problem?"

We told him that we were trying to get back to Wakde.

He said, "Okay, I'll contact Wakde and get them to send a PBY out to meet you. I'll give them your heading."

And, sure enough, we got just about back to New Guinea and there was that PBY. And he turned around us and he flew us back to Wakde. And the last signal from the shore watcher . . . we were thanking him for helping us, and he said, "Guys, I'm glad I could be of help, but I've gotta pack up and move outta here because every time I contact somebody the Japanese get a fix on where I am. I gotta move!"

**Mr. Franklin:** They were still on a portion of the island?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. They occupied all of this. And Henley (?), right in here in this Bay, was a big Japanese base.

**Mr. Franklin:** Now, this is MacArthur's sector, isn't it? Or was that part of Nimitz's Fleet?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, Nimitz and Halsey's Fleets were in here but all of this was occupied by Japan and controlled by Japan. But anyhow, I'd be interested to know what happened to that guy 'because he saved our neck! When we landed we only had twenty minutes of gas left. When we got back, the rest of the planes got back and they got shot up pretty

bad, and as soon as we landed the medics were over there treating the guys that were wounded. And I walked over to one of my friends who was the tail gunner on one of the other planes, and I saw they were working on his head. I went over there and talked to him and there was a nurse there and she handed me a pair of tweezers. She was sitting there with these tweezers. She handed them to me and she says, "You continue to pick that plexi-glass out of his head."

When those Zeroes make a run on you, they pull over to the side and as they fire at you they come around to the rear. So they're shooting right into that tail gunner! So in that tail gunner's turret is five layers of plexi-glass. So the Zero's bullet hit that plexi-glass and it's made to hold a bullet, you know. It's a bullet proof glass, really. But what happens is that it goes through the layers of plexi-glass and in his case the tip of that bullet was sticking out of the end of the last piece of plexi-glass and it sheared, that plexi-glass just sheared and it scalped him. It tore off his helmet. We had those old . . . uh . . .

**Mr. Franklin:** It was a leather helmet wasn't it?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. And some of ours were just cloth; made of cloth. Anyhow, it ripped his helmet off and it scalped him so all of that plexi-glass was stuck in his head. So I sat there for two hours picking that plexi-glass out of that man's head! (Laughs)

**Mr. Franklin:** It was just shards of plexi-glass?

**Mr. Puryear:** Uh-hmm. (Laughs) Quite something, but the other planes went down. We got back. We did the Guam/ Saipan/ Tinian mosaics for the landing there. Then we packed up and came back. Because we had that old, I can't remember the model of the PB4Y1 we had then, but the J, which was the U.S. version of the B-24 and PB4Y1. We came back to the states and we got new crews and new airplanes because our other ones

were in such bad shape that we just had to leave them, except ours because our plane was the latest one there. It was still in pretty good shape. We hadn't got shot up like some of the others had. And so the skipper took our airplane and flew back to the States while we had to take a slow boat; (Laughs) an old troop transport.

**Mr. Franklin:** Oh, you had to take an actual ship back?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. All the Fleet; all of the ground crews and plane crews did. Two planes came back, the skipper and executive officer. There was another newer plane that came in after we did, really. So the skipper and the exec flew those planes home to start the formation . . . to redo our squadron. So, they found an old troop carrier ship and he said, "Well, you can come aboard if you want to. We don't have hardly any food."

So we started back out to Hawaii. We got out just past the Gilbert Islands by about one day and the old ship broke down. We bobbed around out there for two days. It would have been the perfect target for a torpedo, you know. (Laughs) Finally they got one of the boilers going and we limped into Hawaii. But it took us ten days, I think, or twelve days.

**Mr. Franklin:** You didn't have a repair ship that came out to meet you?

**Mr. Puryear:** No, not at that time. So, boy, when we got to Hawaii the skipper radioed ahead and they had a feast for us there on the dock. Then from Hawaii we found a newer ship back to San Diego, well actually we went into San Francisco and back down to Carney Field near San Diego to regroup. We got our new planes, our new crew members, and did a couple months of training. Then we flew back and we were based on Guam at that time, our second trip out.

**Mr. Franklin:** So that first trip, you shipped out in early 1943, when did you go . . .

**Mr. Puryear:** No, see, because in '43 is when I went to school there in Pensacola. That took some time. So it was really early '44, I guess, that I joined that squadron. They had already been out there for almost two years by the time we joined them.

**Mr. Franklin:** How long were you out there before you got sent back to the United States?

**Mr. Puryear:** One year. About a year and, like I say, then we were doing all our work down here. Then we went to our new base on Guam and joined this photo interpretation squadron. That unit was already on Guam when we got there and they were doing photo interpretation for the fleet. There was some aerial photography going on off of the aircraft carriers. That film would be flown in to Guam and this photo interpretation unit would develop the films and process it and all that, and get it back to the fleet. But after we got back to Guam, we joined that photo interpretation group and our skipper took over command of that and they became a part of our Fleet Air Force Squadron One. But they continued to do all of the photo interpretation for the fleet plus all of ours.

**Mr. Franklin:** Did your general duties change when you became a part of the photo interpretation unit?

**Mr. Puryear:** No. Our eight planes became a part of this and we became more of a complete unit. As soon as we would land back on Guam they'd be out there to pick up our film, took it right to the lab, process it, made the prints and the photo interpretation officers would get right on them and start finding the gun emplacements and what was going on on those islands that we were photographing. But our squadron kept four planes on Guam and, like I say, about two to three times a week we'd send a plane to Truk to keep track. They had a huge base on Truk and quite often we'd find little squadrons of



ships headed to Truk to keep them replenished, you know. And when we would be flying over Truk we'd find the cargo ships and stuff there, we'd radio back to Guam and the B-25s would come out and sink them. We always carried four bombs, but we were not a bomber. I don't think we ever hit much. We'd drop them as we flew over with our cameras going. I was in the bomb bay, you know, with the cameras and all of a sudden I'd see those bombs drop. (Laughs)

**Mr. Franklin:** But you only had four of them. That island, Truk was never invaded?

**Mr. Puryear:** No. And it's a beautiful island. But all of these other islands, the Carolinas and other places, for instance there's an island way up here called Marcus. That was a twelve hour flight for us to fly from Guam to Marcus. That was right up in here. And it was kind of a, well what would I say; a forward island to let Japan know what was headed their way. And we'd fly up there twice a week. One of our planes would go and keep track on them. Then after we took Iwo . . . Well first we took Okinawa. We kept two planes there and then we took Iwo Jima and we had two planes there. And we would rotate the eight planes in the squadron; four would be here, two here, and two here; two on Okinawa and two on Iwo Jima. For instance, as soon as they took the airbase on Okinawa, two days later we landed there. And I've got photographs here. The first night the Marines had had set up some tents for us over near the air base and they said, "Now guys, you better dig you some fox holes."

We said, "Oh, we'll do that tomorrow."

Boy, that night! The Bettys were coming in; they were bombing us and strafing us and the kamikazes, you know. In fact, before daylight we were out there digging our fox holes! (Laughs) We got busy real quick.

**Mr. Franklin:** So you landed on the island two days after they took the air field. How far away was the front line?

**Mr. Puryear:** Not far. The battleships were sitting out there firing at the front lines. I've got a picture of that here somewhere. But at night we could sit there watching the phosphorous bombs lighting up the front lines and it wasn't that far away. A couple of times some of the Japs got through the front lines and got over near us. One time, a couple days later, they lobbed an anti-personnel shell into where we were sitting down. We got some hot food there on that second or third day. We were lined up to get some hot food. All the time we had been eating K rations, you know. And we were lined up when that anti-personnel shell came in and exploded and killed, I think it was three guys, four guys. Myself and our crew were kind of knocked down by concussion, but we weren't hit. None of us got hit by shrapnel. We were just at the right spot. We missed the shrapnel.

**Mrs. Puryear – off mic:** Is that when you woke up and found the dead Marine?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. The guy was lying across my leg. He got hit hard. He might have protected me. Maybe the shrapnel that missed me got him, you know.

**Mr. Franklin:** He was hit by it and he was in close proximity?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, he was standing real close to me. And kind of knocked me out; knocked me down. And when I came to the guy was lying across my leg shot up and he was gone.

Then the first flight that we made was from Okinawa to Kyushu. See, remember, that's the Olympic landing. That's where we were going to land on Japan. The southern islands were called the Olympic landing, Tokyo and all of that up here was called Coronet.

**Mr. Franklin:** Those were the future landing sights?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. The operation for the U.S. to go in and invade Japan with Kyushu and the southern islands was called the Olympic landing. To land up here was called the Coronet Operation. They were two different operations. But it was the simultaneous invasion of Japan. That's what we were working on. That was our main mission once we got to Okinawa and Iwo.

**Mr. Franklin:** So you probably have a bit more information about the landing that was supposed to take place?

**Mr. Puryear:** Oh yeah, because they told us what targets up here they wanted us to get photographs of. It was reconnaissance on three different spots right here on Kyushu that they wanted pre invasion information about. So the first night, first day, we flew up there. There were so many Zeroes in the air and anti-aircraft fire that we had to turn around and come back. You know, we were kind of sissies. They'd tell us, "You guys, if it gets too hot get out of there." Because if you get shot down it's not gonna do any good. If we can't get back with the reconnaissance that we go after, you know, don't go. Don't do it. Like, we flew from Okinawa to Shanghai one day to get some information (side A ends) Okay, the first day over Japan we had to turn around and come back because of the anti-aircraft fire and the Zeroes. So the next day over Anishima where the P-51s were assigned, 85 P-51s joined us as we flew over Kyushu. So we had lots of fighter escort! And, boy, they did the job! We were up there 20,000 feet and some of the Zeroes would come in from above us but the P-51s were right after them, you know. And our guys would fire at them too. I remember watching one Zero go by and we said, "Oh boy! Maybe we got him!" Here came two P-51s right behind him, firing on him, and that Zero

went up in a ball of flame as you've probably seen in some of those pictures I have of some of those Zeroes. They would just explode, you know.

**Mr. Franklin:** The Japanese Mitsubishi Zeroes?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. But we still got too much anti-aircraft fire and so we got some. . . We had three targets and we got some photography but it was *so* dangerous flying up there that they probably figured out that we wouldn't survive if we kept it up. So they equipped a Hellcat with a camera in the nose. In fact, they already had some out there with the fleet so they flew two of those planes into Okinawa and they also went up there. But they only had one camera and they couldn't shoot a lot like we could, you know. But they got those targets better than we did.

**Mr. Franklin:** Were they able to shoot at a higher altitude?

**Mr. Puryear:** The Hellcats?

**Mr. Franklin:** Yeah.

**Mr. Puryear:** They went in lower. Most of their work was done between five and eight thousand feet, I'd say; not very high. So we spent a couple of weeks there. And it's interesting here in this book.

**Mr. Franklin:** *Halsey's Typhoon?*

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, *Halsey's Typhoon*. I was not on Okinawa when the first Typhoon came through, but the second was called "Typhoon Viper" and it hit Okinawa. So I added a little bit this here, well, I'll just tell you the story. When Typhoon Viper was heading our way they told the Fleet, Halsey ordered Admiral McCain, who was in charge of the Fleet, off of Okinawa; to up-anchor and get out of there because he didn't want any more ships sunk by a typhoon.

**Mr. Franklin:** There were two of them that hit, right?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. So McCain and the Fleet left and headed east to get out of there and we got orders from Guam that said the typhoon is going to be hitting there, you guys pack up and head for the home base in Guam, you know. The weather people on Okinawa gave us a heading to take to head out of Okinawa to the northeast for so many miles and then turn south to go to Guam. Well, when we took off the weather was still kind of gusty and they said, well, you'll go and fly around the typhoon. Twenty minutes later that typhoon was all over us. It was forming so fast. And we were flying in that typhoon and our fifty caliber machine guns had not been cleaned since we got to Okinawa. Static electricity will burn the carbon out of your guns. So, all ten of our fifty calibers had a flame of about eight to ten inches coming out of the end with that static electricity burning all of the carbon out of there. Now, if we would've had a gas leak (laughs), which B-24s used to have a lot of gas leaks, we would have been blown out of the sky. But, in that flight we hit an air pocket. We were flying at about eight thousand feet, hit an air pocket and fell about a thousand feet. That old B-24s wings just did that, you know, and I was back there in the radar room and I just came up out of my seat. I was airborne as that plane dropped off (laughs).

**Mr. Franklin:** That can't really be a good feeling!

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah! But then we hit bottom and there was so much static electricity, not only burning the carbon out of our guns, that the propellers were just silver-white, and the leading edge of the wing and the tail, were just silver-white from all of the static electricity. When we finally got out of it, about another hour, well, not that long, about

another thirty minutes we were out of the typhoon and everything settled down and we made it back to Guam okay.

But one of the interesting things about flying over Iwo Jima, have you seen that movie about the last bomb drop on Japan? There was a coup. After we dropped the first atomic bomb they didn't surrender. We dropped the second one and they didn't surrender. And we were on Iwo, my crew and another one of our planes. There were two of us there on Iwo and our orders were, we knew they were going to surrender; we thought they were going to surrender after the second bomb for sure, you know, and they said, "Okay, as soon as MacArthur gives us his okay you guys take off and go up there and photograph all of the bay areas where our Fleets will be pulling in because we want to find the sunken ships. We want to see what condition those harbors are in. So you photograph these various bay areas." So we were sitting there waiting and the B-29s from Guam and Saipan were flying over us to hit the main island of Japan. And some of them get shot up so they'd have to come back in and crash land on Iwo. Or for some mechanical reason they'd have to land on Iwo. Anyhow, we didn't know that a coup was going on after the second atomic bomb, but a Japanese Major actually took the Emperor prisoner to keep him from surrendering. Finally, on the fourth day, the Eastern Army they called it; the Eastern Army was over there to protect Tokyo from our Coronet landing plan, and he was superior, of course, to the major. And the Major sent an officer over to the General of the Eastern Army and told him that a coup was going on and they were not going to surrender, and he said that he had the Emperor prisoner. So the General of the Eastern Army said, "No. We're going to follow what our Emperor says he wants to do and if he wants to surrender, we're going to surrender." So he ordered that Major to

stand down and stopped the coup. But the night before there were 840 some odd B-29 out of Guam, Saipan, and Tinian hitting the targets. President Truman, after those four days went by and they hadn't surrendered after the second atomic bomb, nobody knew that the coup was going on, and Truman told all three Fleets, Seventh, Third, and Fifth, and the B-29s to hit them with everything that they got. So it was on that third day or fourth day there were a thousand aircraft over Japan bombing Japan all day long. And then, that night, this friend of ours that lives right down the hall here, his squadron was out of Guam, and he was twenty minutes behind his other . . .

**Mr. Franklin:** He was in the Twentieth Air Force?

**Mr. Puryear:** It was the Twentieth. I'm not sure of what it was, but he lives right down here. When 840 of them took off that night to fire bomb Japan, and they had been bombed all day by the Fleet, and so these 840 B-29s took off to bomb Japan and their main target was Anagi(?) refinery right up here, which we had orders before not to bomb that refinery because that was the only energy that the Japanese people had left. They didn't have much, plus the fact that if we had to land we wanted that refinery intact. So anyhow, President Truman said, "Hit the refinery." And there's a big armory depot just west of Tokyo down here that Travis went after and, so when they took off Travis's B-29 had a gas leak so he didn't get to take off. He had to taxi back over to repair and they repaired his gas leak. Twenty minutes later he was okay so he took off and he was twenty minutes behind the other 840 B-29s, so he made the last bomb drop on Japan because he was bringing up the rear (laughs). But if you hadn't seen that movie about the last bomb drops over Japan. . .

**Mr. Franklin:** Do you know what it was called?

**Mr. Puryear:** *The Last Mission*. I just loaned my copy of it to me neighbor and I don't have it right now, but you need to see that.

**Mr. Franklin:** Honestly that's a story that I hadn't heard about the coup.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, well, most people didn't. After they surrendered that next day, like I said, we had orders to fly and photograph the bay areas for the Fleets. But we couldn't go until MacArthur said okay, and he was down here in the Philippines. He said, "I'm gonna send my troops who are down here in the Philippines up for occupation." So I think that it was three days or four days after the surrender before MacArthur started his flights into Japan. But as soon as he did that we had clearance to go up and photograph the bay areas. And when we got up there the weather was bad. The bay areas are all socked in so we had to land in Japan. And there's a Japanese naval air strip there where the troops were landed and came in and landed there with them on the second day. And I've got some photographs here showing that air base and how badly it had been destroyed by us. But the first troops in there, MacArthur as commanding officer allowed the Japanese officers to stay on the base and took their guns away from them but let them keep their swords, because that's a big honor with the Japanese, having that sword. So all of the Japanese troops were gone when we got there the second day, but all of these B-47s were coming in, well, not B-47s. What was the old carrier plane? C-47s?

**Mr. Franklin:** I think C-47.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, they were the troop carriers. They were landing one right after the other and they were forming a perimeter around that Japanese base. And then some of the intelligence officers, the next day they landed some jeeps, they got in their jeeps and went into Tokyo and Yokohama. Of course, I'm sure that the history of that is there at the



Nimitz on how they went into Tokyo and started taking over. But we were there on that second day, spent some time because of the weather; we landed and then we couldn't fly. But the next day the weather cleared up, we took off, and we did our photo mission over the various harbors and bay areas. Then we flew back to Iwo and there was a plane waiting for that took all of our film, flew back to Guam, processed all of the film and then took it back to the Fleets. And I guess that it was the Fifth Fleet down here where they had to drop the photographs onto a carrier. I forgot the Admiral that was in charge of the Fifth Fleet. Halsey had the Seventh. No Nimitz had the Seventh, so I guess Halsey had the Fifth. I forgot (laughs).

**Mr. Franklin:** Yeah, I'm not sure.

**Mr. Puryear:** But anyhow they needed all of our photographs before they pulled into all of the different bay areas, like Tokyo Bay.

**Mr. Franklin:** Just so that they could tell what was obstructing?

**Mr. Puryear:** Uh-huh. You know, there were cables stretched across the entrances to some of those bays and there were mines. But they had destroyed most of the mines before the surrender.

**Mr. Franklin:** So they were prepared for an invasion of the island.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yes, but before they surrendered we were doing this stretch of the eastern edge of Japan for the Coronet invasion in here. One time, oh I uses it was a couple of months before we dropped the big bomb, we had to go up to Hokkaido in the northern part of Japan. And, boy, we experienced some unusual weather phenomenon up in there. We were flying along in beautiful, clear weather and then all of a sudden the weather just developed all around us; some kind of a front that you couldn't see. And, off course,

there wasn't any use for us to go on. And it was 71 degrees below zero at 20,000 feet. Of course I had an electric suit on because I was standing there at that row of cameras in the bomb bay and that cold air coming up through an open bomb bay made it pretty cold! So anyhow, we turned around and headed back to Iwo.

**Mr. Franklin:** That brings up an interesting question. What was the average temperature in the bomb bay?

**Mr. Puryear:** Oh, of course down there in Guadalcanal it was, at 20,000 feet we'd have to have a flight suit and everything, it was probably down in the forties; the thirties or forties. But at low altitude it would be in the seventies and eighties, or nineties.

**Mr. Franklin:** Because the higher up you go the colder it gets.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah. But finally, after the Japanese surrendered and we did our flights over the various harbors for ships of the Fifth Fleet and Seventh Fleet to pull in, and the Third Fleet, we went back to Iwo and stayed maybe another week and we made a few more flights over certain areas that the Fleet needed before they pulled into certain ports. Then we flew back to Guam and our crew was one of the senior crews because we had already been to Okinawa. So we had enough points to pack up and return to the States. So we spent, I think, two weeks on Guam before we got our orders to return home. And during that time we also made a couple of flights over Truk and a couple of other islands around there. Then my crew and another crew who had been involved in Guadalcanal two years before were given permission to fly home. Our route was to fly from Guam to Johnston Island, spend the night; Johnston Island to Hawaii and then return to the States.

**Mr. Franklin:** What month was that?

**Mr. Puryear:** That was, I'm trying to remember. It's in here somewhere! (Laughs) I'd have to look it up. Do you want me to look it up?

**Mr. Franklin:** If you want.

**Mr. Puryear:** Okay. Turn that off and let me look it up. . . Okay, after the surrender we spent several weeks on Guam and then, being one of the senior crews, we got orders to return to the States. And that was in March of '46. And then I was mustered out of the Navy. But I stayed in Reserves. They told me that if I stayed in Reserves and went back to school that I could be commissioned. So I received a commission in the Reserves here in Austin. Then I joined a unit that was a defense research unit out at the University of Texas. They had a billet for one supply officer. And what happened when I went into Reserves, I got out of Naval Air. I said I didn't want to fly anymore. I'm lucky to be home! (Laughs) I don't want to be flying in any more PB4Y1s so I switched over to the supply corps, because I was going to school then and getting a degree in business. So I was commissioned as a supply officer and then when the Korean War broke out, that was a logistical war, and they called up every supply officer that they could find. And Janet and I had just married in 1950 and then, what was it honey, March of '51, we got orders to go to Vail, New Jersey to go to Naval Supply School. That was, what, February honey?

**Mr. Puryear's wife** (off mic): February or March.

**Mr. Puryear:** February or March of 1950.

**Mr. Puryear's wife** (off mic): 1951.

**Mr. Puryear:** 1951. Okay. And then I went to that supply school for about four or five months and then we were shipped out to San Francisco to go aboard a carrier as an

aviation supply officer. Then we got our flight crews aboard down in San Diego and then took off for Korea. We spent, I guess, about a year in operations off of Korea. Spent about two years and then came back and was released from active duty. I stayed in supply as reserve at officer's capacity and joined the University of Texas defense research unit and we met every Monday night. Finally, after 22 years I retired as a Lieutenant Commander. So that's a pretty good history of my naval career.

**Mr. Franklin:** When World War II ended what was your rank?

**Mr. Puryear:** I was a photo-mate first class enlisted man.

**Mr. Franklin:** Are there any squadron mates, or particular people that you remember, maybe, more than others?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, you know, you kind of gravitate towards people who are kind of your own personality and such. When we were going through the Pensacola school, Tommy Peters, he's an old friend of mine, he's still living out around Los Angeles, and we talk once in a while. But as far as my squadron people are concerned, the one I was closest to, he died. He lived out in Denver and he died, gosh, 15 years ago. And there's another one that lives over in Pennsylvania and I haven't had any contact with him in the last few years. So really I have had no contact with any of our crew members. You know, 86 years old and I'm lucky to be here! (Laughs) And our squadron really did not have any reunions as such, but when I was out off of Korea I was transferred from the USS Philippine Sea, a carrier, to a destroyer because they didn't have another supply officer out there to go aboard this destroyer that needed a supply officer. So I was transferred from that aircraft carrier to the destroyer, the USS Brush, number 745. In my last few months off of North Korea I was aboard that destroyer. Lieutenant Beaudoux was aboard

that destroyer, it was a Fletcher destroyer, and we served together on that. In fact I got an e-mail from him today! So we keep in contact with him. And the Brush has a reunion every year, and they've had it every year since the Korean War.

**Mr. Franklin:** It seems kind of funny that the photo reconnaissance group doesn't have one because it was one of the only naval photo recon groups that existed.

**Mr. Puryear:** That's right. And I wish that somebody had put together some reunions. In particular our flight squadrons, because all eight plane personnel were real close. Now on the ground crew, Photo Interpretation Two, that was part of our Fleet Air Photo One, the ground crew; there is a friend of mine from Beaumont that I met on Guam. He was a member of the ground crew and after the war we both discharged. I got home earlier than he did, but he wanted to start a photo business. So I said well, I'll start the business with you. That was in March. And I said but in September I'm going to go to the University of Texas and get my degree. So I helped him start the photo business, you know, he and I together. Because both of us were old Beaumonters and we got our old friends together and, you know, customers. My dad helped me get the ship yard down in Orange, Texas. We did pretty good getting started and that photo business in Beaumont is still going.

**Mr. Franklin:** What's it called?

**Mr. Puryear:** It's called "Christopher Photography." My Friend's name is Christopher, Ralph Christopher. And his son is running the business now. Ralph is dead and gone but his youngest son runs that business now. It's been going all these years since 1946.

**Mr. Franklin:** You went got your degree after the war.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, I got my degree and then I went to work here in Austin for a real estate/ general insurance firm. I worked for them until the Korean War started. We went

to Korea and came back and then a friend of mine, he and I started our own business called Hanks Courier Company. His name was Roger Hanks and he was from an old Austin family and had a lot of contacts and, so, we did real well. Later we bought another agency, the Rawlings, Montgomery, and Niemand Company, which was an old, old firm here and then we changed the name to Rawlings, Montgomery, Niemand, Hanks, and Puryear. Kept that name for two years and then changed the name to Niemand, Hanks, and Puryear. So we were in business for about forty years. And the firm continues to exist, the insurance part of it. The Real estate firm is gone, or the department is gone. But the insurance firm is now called Frost, from Frost Bank. Our agency is Frost Insurance now.

**Mr. Franklin:** Wow. That's the company that you started?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah.

**Mr. Franklin:** It was once the highest building in Austin!

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah it is, or was! But Roger Hanks and I started in a little office that was twelve foot square! His desk was in one corner and my desk was in another corner. And we started out with just the two of us and when I retired we had 48 employees; three partners and 48 employees. So it grew real nicely. It was a good business.

There was something else that I wanted to add. During the Korean War, I went aboard the USS Philippine Sea, the aircraft carrier, and my first job aboard the carrier was the disbursement officer. I kept track of all the money, made the pay-rolls, and stuff like that. Just before we left to go over to Korea out of San Diego I had to go aboard to get cash to last us a few months in Japan and Korea so I phoned the bank and then I needed \$1,200,000 in cash. That was a lot of money and at that time there was a

disbursement officer up in San Francisco that had been ambushed after he drew some money out. He only drew out a couple hundred thousand. And he was ambushed by this mob that stole his money so we were put on high alert about going in and getting cash for the ships. Of course the banks had been handling that for years; supplying the naval ships with American dollars in cash. And it was such a high alert that the Chief Petty Officer in my office, the disbursement office, was kind of a nervous gut anyhow, but we talked about going in and what we needed, you know; how many Marines to take with us, and how many cars to go pick up that much money. So we decided that we'd take eight Marines with us; four of them in an armored carrier vehicle to lead us and then four in a jeep behind us. And the Chief and I would be armed. We both had our firearms on and he carried a .45. I only carried a .32. A .45 was too heavy (laughs). So we got to the bank. I went into the bank and got the satchel and verified the amount of money and everything. So the Chief and I came out of the bank and the Chief was so nervous he had his .45 out (laughs)!

**Mr. Franklin:** He had it drawn?

**Mr. Puryear:** He had it drawn already! So we got into the car and I sat in the back seat and the Chief and a driver sat in the front seat. And we were right at a corner, the bank was right up on a corner in San Diego, and just as we started to move and the light turned green a car came by just us on the left and around like this, well, we almost hit him. And so right away the Chief says, "Uh-oh! Somebody's trying to cut us off!" He jumps out of the car with the .45 and sticks it into the window of that guy in that car (laughs). That guy almost died! And the Marines all jumped out with their rifles and surrounded the car. The poor guy was sitting there "OOOHHH, what's wrong!?"

**Mr. Franklin:** He just made a really dumb turn.

**Mr. Puryear:** Sure did!

**Mr. Puryear's Wife** (off mic): That was in San Diego?

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, that was in San Diego. That's when we were living in La Jolla. She joined me out there before we left and while we were there training the crews and everything we lived in La Jolla. I guess for about three or four months. But that was quite an incident!

One other kind of interesting incident during the Korean War; we went out on the line out off of Korea. We returned to Yokosuka, the naval base there in Japan. Anyhow, we returned and the next day was pay day. Of course all of the ships crew and Marines on board, they can't wait until pay day. So we were there, I think the second day was pay day. That night my First Class Petty Officer in my office, I had the Chief Petty Officer, a First Class Petty Officer, and eight other boys in that office to take care of payroll and all of the necessary work in the disbursement office. Anyhow, at about one o'clock in the morning I got a phone call. I was sound asleep. And when a ship pulls into port they have to supply so many shore patrol people to watch over all of the guys that go ashore. So at about one o'clock in the morning I got a phone call from this Marine. I was up here in Yokohama and he said, "Mr. Puryear, some of your boys have just torn up a geisha house. You've gotta come get 'em. If we take 'em in they're gonna throw 'em in the brig and we won't get our pay tomorrow. It's pay day tomorrow." And so, what had happened was that this First Class Petty Officer, he's an old salt, and he had been in the Navy a long time. And we had a young boy from Tennessee; first time he had ever left Tennessee, he'd never been out to sea in his life. So the boys talked him into going to



Yokosuka to go to this geisha house. And, so, the Mamasan would feed them hot sake, you know, that's how they'd get them pretty tight pretty quick. So the Mamasan had fed them all hot sake and this little boy from Tennessee, it was this first time he'd ever had anything to drink, and he got so drunk that he went through the walls of that geisha house! And the walls then were just made out of paper with one by two struts and he walked through every wall, torn down every wall of that geisha house (laughs)! So I got another Marine, no, I got the Chief Petty Officer, and we took some cash with us and we went into Yokohama and drove up. Some of our shore patrol met us on the edge of town and took us in to where it was. And the Mamasan was out there when I drove up. Boy, she came out there and was just yakking me! Of course, I couldn't understand a word she said (laughs). Boy, she was mad! But the boys were all sitting there having a good time and we loaded them up into a personnel carrier. And the Mamasan wanted somebody to pay for her damages, and I think that I had taken some Yen, you know, Japanese money with me. And it was 360 Yen to a dollar at that time and I think I paid her about 30 to 40 dollars in Japanese Yen and she was happy (laughs). I lost a lot of sleep that night.

**Mr. Franklin:** But you saved them from the brig.

**Mr. Puryear:** That's right! They would've gone to the brig. So anyhow, we had pay day the next day and the Marines were happy. Yeah, that was quite a time. (To wife) Honey, can you think of any more incidents from my old stories?

**Mr. Puryear's wife** (off mic): No, I can't think of any. But you tell other people stories all the time that I don't hear. (Laughs) So I don't hear them all.

**Mr. Puryear:** Yeah, well, I guess we can wind it up.

**Mr. Franklin:** Well, I want to thank you on behalf of the museum and on behalf of myself. Thank you for your service and thank you for sharing your stories with us.

**Mr. Puryear:** It was my pleasure because, you know, there has been very little information or publicity about a small independent squadron like that. I've seen very little written about our squadron, which, like I said, Admiral Nimitz ordered the formation of it. A small independent squadron like that didn't have much publicity but we did an important job.

**Mr. Franklin:** Yeah, you had quite an impact. And I thank you very much for sharing everything with us today.

**Mr. Puryear:** I enjoyed it.

Transcribed by Michael Franklin from copy of master tape

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