

Lyle Bradley Oral History Interview

KENNETH THOMPSON: This is Kenneth Thompson, today is September the 19th, 2009. I am interviewing Lieutenant Colonel Lyle Bradley, United States Marine Corps and Reserve. This interview taking place at Fredericksburg High School in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Nimitz Museum Symposium 2009. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, and for the preservation of historical information related to this site. First off, let me thank you for taking time to share your story with us today, Colonel Bradley. If you would, sir, give us a little background on yourself, please.

LYLE BRADLEY: Well, I was born on November 22nd, 1924 in the little town of Key West, Iowa, which is just below Dubuque, Iowa, and my parents were Roy Bradley and Blanche Bradley, and moved to Dubuque when I was a year old. My father was a carpenter by trade but then he started in on the postal service about that time, and we lived in a place called 1770 Hale Street in a house that is still there. I was there just two weeks ago, and I feel very fortunate on having those two as my parents. I think they did a great job, we had some disagreements like all human beings have

but I think overall, it was a good home start. One of the things that I was interested in, right from a very young age -- it may be five or six years old -- I was interested in birds, and I could identify every single bird species that was in our yard, or in our area, very early. And this really led to an interest in aviation, and when I was seven, my dad took me on my first plane ride in an old Ford Tri-Motor, and both of us were up there, and we had to stand because there were no more seats on the airplane. Now, that goes against the grain today that you're loose as a missile flying around in case of an accident.

Anyway, but I developed a strong -- interesting, on that specific day when we took that ride in Dubuque, Iowa, Charles Lindbergh was there on the field at that time, and I saw him at a distance not realizing that later on, I would even be working with him but that was my first view of Charles Lindbergh. Now, this would've been in 1931, so he had made his famous crossing in 1927. Well anyway, I went through the school system in Dubuque, and was out for a number of sports, and I played football when I was 148 pounds at a senior, and then I started playing it in college at 148, and I just got beat to a pulp, and I quit. (laughs) But anyway, after graduation from high school --

and I had determined when I was in eighth grade, I wanted to go out west and raise beef cattle, that was one of my chief interests, because I always loved farming. But I went to college right after to the University of Dubuque. Now, I graduated from college in 1942. Pearl Harbor was 1941, December 7th. I was hunting that day, and I didn't know about Pearl Harbor until I got home that evening, and I couldn't believe it. My mother said, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" And I had to tell her where Pearl Harbor was, but anyway, I was very perturbed and it was interesting because in 1937, a guy by the name of Roy [Coates?] at our church, he predicted that we would be at war with Japan within a few years. And Roy wasn't there at that time because he committed suicide just about a year before that, but his prediction came true. And so anyway, I didn't do anything about it. Of course, I hadn't graduated from high school yet, and I graduated high school in 1942, and then I wanted to college so I went to the University of Dubuque, and that was a local college. And I was very interested in -- well, I played football for a little while then I quit, and then I joined the boxing team, and so I did some boxing at that time, and one night, two of us, Bob [Peat?] and I, were sitting there cooling off from our round, and Bob said, you know, he says, "I'm thinking of joining the Marine Corps."

And I said, "I've been thinking the same thing." Both of us went down the next day and we joined the Marine Corps. That would've been about the second week of September, 1942, and so anyway, the Marine Corps, the sergeant at the recruiting station, said, "Well, stay in school," he said, "We'll call you when you're ready and it'll be probably a month before you get a call." I was surprised, I thought it would be quicker than that. Well anyway, we did stay in school, and one week later, we had a traveling caravan coming around to the college, and it composed of the Army, the Navy, Naval Air Force and so on, and they said that the word had just been changed because at that time, in order to get in the aviation, you had to be a college graduate. They said they had just changed the rule, now all that you had to do was be in college. Well suddenly, things [about?] my intense interest in aviation, and now, I guess there's a chance. So I went up to the -- it was a lieutenant commander there, and I talked to him and I said, "We've already enlisted in the Marine Corps," but he said, "Don't worry," he says, "if you can pass these tests," he said, "we'll take care of the Marine Corps." So anyway, I got the forms for him, and I sent them in right away, and they sent me back from Minneapolis some other stuff, so the day I was 18, November 22nd, 1942, I was on the train to

Minneapolis to pass my test for Naval Aviation, and I passed, and that was the start of a career in aviation. But again, I was told to stay in school as long as possible, so I did. They didn't call me until, I don't remember, January or February, went to Aberdeen, South Dakota, where I was flying light planes, and it was a [fore and aft?] Aeronca. My instructor sat in the front seat and I sat in the backseat. Now, I had a guy by the name of Al Anderson who was my instructor, weighed about 250, heavy smoker and a heavy drinker. I can even smell the alcohol on his breath almost every morning. Well anyway, I didn't realize that he was a lousy instructor but I got through it OK, and he said, "You're OK'd to solo," so we taxied out, he got out of the airplane and got out, and he said, "OK, make three landings and then we'll go back in." That's all you had to do to pass your solo. So I poured the power to it and almost killed myself because the airplane climbed almost vertically, like this, and it was all I could do to hold the airplane down. What had happened was, with his weight -- and he's in the front -- and he gets out, what happened, the plane wants to climb, and the trim tabs are only in the front seat so I couldn't do anything about it. He was supposed to change the tabs to compensate for his weight. Well anyway, I landed with two hands on the stick,

holding it down, and he said, "Nice landing," yeah, but I said, "Al, you forgot to change the trim ta--" "Oh God," he says. So we changed them and then I went back and made the landings, it was OK. Well, two weeks later, we were coming out there -- this is in Aberdeen -- and we were staying in the college there and then they were running us out to the airfield. Two weeks later, we got out there and here's a guy doing loops right over the top of the hanger, and so we were watching him, and a guy by the name of Wilson, I can't remember his first name. Anyway, and he was standing there, he was maybe 20 feet away from me, you just see the look on his face and he's gritting his teeth and roll his fist up, you know. Finally, the guy landed, got out of his airplane, fell flat on his face. It was my instructor, he was drunk. So anyway, [Ain?] Wilson was his name, he went over -- now, Ain was not very big -- but he picked him up and he plowed him right there in front of us. He said, "You're fired, get out of here, I never want to see you again." That was the end of my instructor. But guess who I got for my new instructor? Ain Wilson. So I found out quickly that in flying, they go from A to Z, and I had an A, and Ain Wilson (inaudible) as a Z in my original instructor. It was a good learning experience. Anyway, from there we went to Iowa City, Iowa, for our preflight,

no flying. It was all physical activity and all ground school, good program. But it was interesting, when I pulled in there that day (laughs) there was about 50 guys lined up with arms in slings, you know, and so they call them the cripple squad. They said, "Go home! Go home!" (laughs) Anyway, but it was a great thing. We had a lot of professionals there, we had Bernie Bierman from the University of Minnesota, who was the football coach. We had a guy by the name of -- the University of Michigan, for our swimming coach. And swimming was a very key thing at preflight, everybody had to pass that swimming test, and that was very hard. Now, I remember we had one guy that I got to know very well later on, was from Missouri, and he almost flunked, and he said he was so worried because he'd never done much swimming. But anyway, it was good, you had to swim two miles in the pool, the big, huge pool at Iowa City, back and forth, and you had to do it several ways. You could inflate your clothes if you had to, or you could swim whatever you wanted but you had to cover two miles, and you had to do it on a certain specific time, I don't remember what that was. Anyway, it was good. I thought preflight was great. From there, went into Minneapolis and we flew the N2S, they called it the Yellow Peril. They were all painted yellow, they were open-cockpit airplanes,

biplane, and no radio in them, and so flew those for about 150 hours, if I remember right, and had very good luck there. One morning, I was the first one out on the field because one of the things we had to do is we had to hit a big white circle, which is about as big as this classroom approximately, so you came over, you cut your power all the way back, just like you did stick, and bring the airplane around and you had to hit right in the middle of that big circle. No problem. Well, I was there first one morning and so after you land, then you put the power on it and you go around and try it again, and a ring-necked pheasant jumped up with the power surge, [frightened?] the bird got up, and I caught him in the wing wires of the airplane, so I had a pheasant hung there for the full flight. I got back to the base, and one of the attendants or one of the guys came out and said, "What are you going to do with that pheasant?" I said, "I don't know," he said, "Can I take it?" I said, "Sure," so I guess he took it home, I don't know, (laughs) but anyway. But then one morning, we got caught up in a fog, and sometimes fogs come in very fast, and it caught about 20 of us practicing aerobatics up high, and anyway, so now you had two choices. We have no radio communication with the ground, so do you bail out, take it down, or do you let down through the fog? Well, I liked to

let down through the fog. So anyway, I cut the power back as low as possible and just slowly got the plane going down through the fog, and all of a sudden, something -- zing -- right by my wing, and it happened to be the sign on top of the First National Bank, which was the highest building in Saint Paul. Then, I knew where I was but I missed it by about 20 feet, I guess. And I wrote an article in a book on that, so that sign is still there today after many years but I almost took it with me (laughs) if I'd hit that sign, I wouldn't be here today. But anyway, those are some of the interesting things, and then from there, I went to Pensacola, Florida, and we had different airplanes down there, including the SNJ, which was the Air Force AT-6, same airplane, so got through there. Got my wings in April of '44. Then we went onto our advanced program, and now we're starting to fly airplanes that are in combat, and one of the first things that we had were the F4F, the Wildcat. Terrible airplane by comparison to what we had later on, and almost killed myself five times in. The airplane, I think, was trying to kill me. But anyway, got through that OK, and then we went onto the west coast, and that's where we got the Corsair. And that was my dream airplane, it was fabulous. It was almost like you died and had gone to heaven, and went through that syllabus very rapidly. Made

a few mistakes; I tried to get her up to the speed of sound one day in a dive, and almost tore the airplane apart, and I had a little explaining to do (laughs) then, but anyway, we had an outstanding instructor by the name of E.B. Jones, and boy, I'll tell you, he was from Guadalcanal, he had flown with Joe Foss and those guys on Guadalcanal, and one of the things that he loved to do is he loved to go around clouds. And so he'd get us in a column, and we'd be tucked up within just a couple feet of the airplane right ahead, and we'd go around these clouds, you know, and we'd go on our back, and we'd do aerobatics around them. I just loved that, oh, that was so good, and he was a wonderful instructor. Well, anyway, so we finished the tactic procedures and we got called in one day, oh, I suppose there was a hundred of us in the room, and all Corsair pilots. They said that the Navy has just given us the OK to go onboard carriers. See, the Navy did not want the Corsair onboard the carrier because of the long nose, it's (inaudible) a little bit, and there were some other factors too which get too detailed to get into here. But anyway, they said that the Navy wants Corsairs now onboard because the Corsair was the fastest airplane, faster than the F6F, and that's what they needed: something with more speed to make sure those kamikazes didn't get through to the ships.

So they said, "We need eight squadrons, and we're going to put two squadrons on each carrier; one carrier on each task unit." So that means eight squadrons, and each squadron would have about 20, 27 pilots so that's the number. So we started FCLP, which is field carrier landing practice, two days later. Things moved so rapidly, and we had to get five cuts -- cut is a -- an LSO, landing signal officer, is the guy with the flags, and he's the one that brings you in, and you sort of put the whole essence of yourself and your airplane in his hands, and these guys are good. They're all pilots, they've all flown a number of airplanes, and they can tell almost down to about one knot how fast your speed is, so they know whether you're doing too slow, too fast, so they're very good. Never have seen a bad one yet. Anyway, so we went out and we started doing that, and a bunch of us went through pretty fast, so after we finished that basic thing, we went back, they said, "Pack your bags, you're leaving tonight." And they flew us up to San Francisco, the first eight of us, and so we were up there, and we were in San Francisco overnight, and the next day they put us onboard the *China Clipper* and they flew us out to Hawaii, and there we checked out on the carrier. We had to go out on a CVE, that's a light carrier -- the E was the elementary carrier. So as I remember, we

made seven passes, and on the seven passes you had to get five cuts, so I made five passes and got five cuts, so I was qualified there. And several of the guys, the same way. So then the next day, we jumped on a C-54 and they flew us out to Guam. They were really in a hurry to get us out there. We flew to Guam, made a couple flights out there just to keep our fingers going, and then they took us onboard the carrier, which the CV, that's a big carrier, and there's a *Bennington*. And so that was in October. I think it was October of 1944. You know, that's 60 years, that's a little hard to remember these exact dates but I think that's right. I could look at my log book, but anyway. So anyway, and that's when we were in combat. And the captain of the ship that I can't remember right now -- but anyway, he came down and visited us and welcomed us aboard, and there were five of us went on as replacement pilots because they had lost five in a recent strike. And so we were put in different divisions, and I remember I was in Don Frame's division, he was a full major, and so we had a major and a captain and two of us second lieutenants in the division of four, and we would always fly in divisions like that, or sections as two airplanes. And so anyway, we started out, and our first mission was to go to the island of [Kaikai?], and Kaikai Island was an island that the

kamikazes had been using, and they'd fly down at night and then they house their airplanes there, and then they take off when they need them to go against our ships. And that the previous flight, the previous time they had been to Kaikai was one week earlier, and they shot down three airplanes on one dive. So their AA was very effective. So anyway, we circled up there at 26,000, and we circled up there for almost three hours because we wanted to keep an eye on what was happening down there at this field, and then after that, Major Frame says, "OK, we're going to dive here," and we had all this pre-briefed exactly what the direction we were going to go and so on. So we went down, and they did fire at us, put a lot of AA in the air but we all got through OK, nobody was hit. But I was thinking of something. As we were circling up there at 26,000, which is a long way down there, I said, "If I only had a pair of binoculars, jeez, I could see it." Well, I had brought my binoculars on because I was interested in birds, and I used those binoculars because I'd go out on the carrier whenever I had a free time, and just watch some of the albatross species, you know, and so on. So I said, "I'm going to bring my binoculars," so I did. I started bringing my binoculars on every flight that I had, and at times, I didn't use them but one flight that I had, we were circling

an island, I can't remember the name of the island, but anyway, about a mile away from the air field while I was scanning it, I see the shape of a wing sticking out from underneath a tree, so I called Frame and I told him. "Well," he said, "I don't see it." So we made another big circle around, came around, so I pointed it out again, he still couldn't see it. "OK, Bradley," he says, "you got the lead," so I had the lead. So we came around, and we were about ready to go in because of the limitation on fuel. And I came around, and so I had rockets that day, I had four rockets under each wing, and so I pointed it right down at that and then the other guys followed me down, and so I fired the rockets right where I'd seen that -- and holy smokes, airplane parts went all over, and that's where the kamikazes were hiding, see? They would bring it down, haul them way off the field, nobody's ever going to hit them there. And anyway, so according to our estimate, we figured we had obliterated 40 airplanes there. Those binoculars really paid off, so I used them all the time after that, and sometimes I didn't -- but anyway, so they gave me credit for 10 airplanes that day, and that was on the ground of course. So that was a good day. Then, about two weeks later, we were scheduled to fly a mission to a place called -- oh God, why can't I remember this --

Kumamoto, Japan. Kumamoto in Japan is one of the big aircraft factories that they had, and we knew that they were making airplanes there, so the guy that came in to brief us, the intelligence officer, said, "We're going to hit that aircraft factory exactly at seven o'clock in the morning." The reason for seven o'clock is change of shifts. In wars, you hate to talk about this, but the maximum thing is to kill people that are doing the work, and that's what we were after. So it was a big mission. We had airplanes from four different carriers going out on this, so there had to be close to 100 airplanes anyway on this mission. And we were four Corsairs, and we were the medium cover so we were ahead of everybody else, so we were going to be the first ones in, and our job was to see if we could hit any aircraft that was shooting at us and so on. So anyway, we went ahead and we started going down to pick up speed, and then as we were -- I was out to the far right. As I looked down here, I see a train coming around the corner. I thought, train, God, I've never shot a train in my life. And I had rockets. It was perfect. So anyway, I went down, and I shot four rockets. Two of them hit the track right ahead of the locomotive, and two of them hit the locomotive. So the locomotive blew up and almost blew me up too, but, anyway, so then I looked as I

was going back, I look and see all these train -- the cars going -- so I got the whole train. Well then, so we rendezvoused, and as we rendezvoused, I looked off the distance, and way down -- the sun was just coming up. Looked down on the sun streak and here I see this Jap airplane going. So I tallyhoed it. Now, the major, Frame, had a hard time picking up details and he couldn't see it. And I was worried once that thing got out of that sun streak, you couldn't see it. So I tallyhoed it again, I said, "Major, you got to look close," he said, "OK, you got the lead," so I went down and I just used my .50-calibers, I had three .50-calibers in each wing. I pressed the trigger, and just as soon as I pressed the trigger, fire all over, and I went right by it, and I felt a little sadness because the pilot was slumped over in the cockpit, and so I must've hit him, and the poor gunner in the backseat, that's a twin-engine fighter, it has a pilot and gunner, and this gunner is trying to beat the flames out. I just really felt sad. But anyway, and they just went over and they crashed into the water.

KT: What kind of plane was that?

LB: That was a Nick. It's called a Nick, it's a Kawasaki airplane. Now, that name is familiar because I'm going to give you something about that airplane later on. But

anyway, so I got credit for that airplane, and we went back to the ship. But it was interesting, the rear gunner was shooting at me but he's hitting my wing man, and he severed the fuel line in my wing man, [Herb Fremmer?] was his name. Still alive, still in Minnesota. Anyway, and so on the way back, he didn't know he was leaking gas, and I didn't see it either because gas coming out in a little stream is hard to see. So he said, "Jesus," he says, "Look and see if I'm leaking fuel," he says, "my gas gauge is going down so fast." Well then I got up real close to him and I could see that. And he said, "Well, at the rate they're going down, I'm not going to make it back." So anyway, now here's where we have this current symposium on submarines and so on, and we had been pre-briefed to where the submarines and destroyers were, we call them picket ships. And boy, you remember those. You can't write it down because in case you're shot down, we don't want the Japanese to know exactly where the ships are so you have to memorize it, so I said, "Well we're getting close to one of the picket ships," and so finally we saw him and it was a destroyer, and so he realized he wasn't going to make it so while he had some gas still to keep the power up, he made a beautiful water landing right along side the destroyer, and they picked him up, and then they brought him back and he

was back on the carrier in two hours, so it worked out fine. But anyway, and that was the only plane that I shot down. I shot at a couple more that other guys got credit for but anyway, so it was -- well, we got back, and I got through that, and then we hit the typhoon of June 5th, 1945. And Admiral Halsey and Admiral McCain got in a little scrap, and we were listening to this over the teletype. Admiral McCain -- that's John McCain's grandfather -- I thought it was his father all the time until I read this book and I realized it was his grandfather. He was the second in charge, and he begged Halsey to hold up on these -- see, we had missions scheduled, and Halsey had a nickname of "Bull" because he didn't change his mind -- only a fool doesn't change his mind. Anyway, so he said, "No, we're going." So he sent us all through this typhoon, and it was a bad one. Much worse than anyone had anticipated. Were you in this panel this morning? They were talking about these 60, 80 foot waves? That's exactly right. I went up, I was awakened about two o'clock in the morning because I was hanging onto my bunk, and so I went up topside up in the bridge, and here our flight deck is 60 feet above the water. We had waves coming down on top of the flight deck, and some of those waves were hitting so

hard, what they did is they bent the whole forward part of the flight deck down over the bow. That was it.

KT: What carrier was this?

LB: This was the *Bennington*. And so now we're in trouble. So the next day, we found out what damage -- I think it was three or four destroyers that was capsized, all hands lost. We had four guys swept off of our decks, lost. We lost 55 airplanes on our carrier because of the crashing against each other on the air deck and so on. It was a terrible loss. Halsey, with his decision there, did more damage than the Japanese had done in the last year. And everybody was mad about it. Well anyway, so we were finished, we had to come back to the States, and we did. We went back, and they sent us to El Centro, and matter of fact, they took away our Corsairs, they wanted them out in the fleet now. Now we're short out Corsairs, so we had to take F6Fs, we were flying F6Fs in El Centro, California.

KT: Is that the Hellcat?

LB: That's a Hellcat. Very good airplane. Matter of fact, just a better carrier plane than the Corsair is. It's not as fast but it's good, it's pretty. Anyway, then we were down to El Centro and then all of a sudden, they dropped an atomic bomb, and the war was over, and that was it. So I had a nice -- the Marine Corps if I wanted to go regular,

and I said, "No, I want to go back to college," and at that time, they didn't have a program where you could go to college and the military would pay for it. They have that now but they didn't have it then. So anyway, I went home to Dubuque, Iowa, and went back to college, and I went to Iowa State and I was there for three years and finished up, and I started graduate school then in 1950, in the spring of 1950. And I was in the reserve program up in Minneapolis. We were flying Corsairs up there. So June 25th, 1950 was when the Korean War started, and about in July -- August I guess it was -- we went to Cherry Point, North Carolina for our annual maneuvers. Two weeks every year, we as reservists go to someplace, and we either go out to Cherry Point or El Centro, California. And we were down in Cherry Point, so the day before we came back to Minnesota, there was a Marine general there. And he says, "Don't worry, there's no plan on recalling the reserves." He was way out of it. They already had our orders cut. When we got back to Minnesota, we were given our orders, (laughs) we are on our way to Korea as a squadron, and so anyway, I had a car, I sold the car which happened to be a 1936 Rio, which they are only two sold in the state of Iowa in 1936, so that was the last one they had made. Now, it's worth about \$300,000. At that time, I sold it for \$80.

(laughs) But anyway, we left in one week, went to the west coast, we jumped onboard a ship called the USS [Analack?], I think was the name of it. And we got off at Kobe, Japan, and we were put in a pilot pool. Oh wait, I have to back up. On the way over, we had a bunch of young marines on board, some of which had never gone through basic training. One kid I remember talking to, he had been in the Marine Corps for two weeks. He had just signed up for it. These guys are on their way to war, no training at all, I couldn't believe it. There was a major and a captain from that group in Duluth, Minnesota, and these guys knocked themselves out on board while we were going over there training these guys to strip their rifles, to [close?] order drills. We were helping out with them. And I remember, we had a poker game one night, and the major there that was in charge of it, he was so tired, he put his head down on the table and fell asleep during the poker game. That doesn't happen very often. But anyway, these guys just really -- I think if anybody deserves a meritorious achievement award, they really did. Anyway, so we were put in a pilot pool, we got there, and that's not good. Pilot pools are no good because what happens is, if anything comes in that's the lousiest job, you'd probably get it, and that's what happened. Now, one of the guys,

[Tom Odenbough?], who I had gone to college with and also in the reserve program, he said, "To hell with this noise," so they asked for pilots to volunteer to fly [or wise?], that's an artillery spotting plane, so he took that job and he went immediately to Korea. He was over there. On his second hop he was shot down, and he was captured by the North Koreans, and we've never heard from him since, don't know what happened. And so then I had a little time and I was putting in as a communication officer, which is bad because it takes two years of school. I didn't have any schooling on communications, you know, gee, we got all these high powered -- and you have the top secret clearance and so on, and once you have a top secret clearance, you cannot fly combat. I got over there to fly airplanes, you know, that was my job, I think I was pretty good at it. Anyway, so I had this job, and it was 24 hours on and you're 24 hours off, that's the way it works. Terrible, you know, 24 hours, you don't know what you're doing. Well anyway, so one time, I was up at a place called Nara, Japan. Very, very beautiful place, it was untouched by World War II. I went up there by myself and I spent all day just looking around the beautiful little city. That evening, I was ready to get the train back to the base because I had to start the next morning, and while I was

sitting there, there was a Japanese man sitting across the -- they have a big round [tea?] bar is what they had there, and he was sitting across there just glowering at me. Well, I had my uniform on, had my wings on, and we weren't popular but this guy got up and he walked around, and so I turned, and I figured, well, I'll use a little boxing experience if he's going to swing at me, I'll [bury?] his blow. Anyway, and in perfect English, better English than I had, he said, "What kind of planes do you fly?" And that was the start of a very good friendship. He happened to be a medical doctor at that time, and I didn't know all this when he was talking to me but I told him I flew Corsair, "Oh," he says, "Whistling Death." That was the nickname for the Corsair by the Japanese, and so anyway, he said, "Why don't you come over my house?" And he looked up the schedule, he said, "You can take the next train in an hour and an a half," so I did. So I went over his house, and his wife met us at the door. She immediately put a bottle of sake out, which is rice wine, and as a matter of fact, I think we went through two bottles there. But anyway, and she got a lot of rice cakes and various things, she had a very good cook apparently. So then he pulled this book out as a recognition book, because he told me what plane he flew too because he said he had been a Japanese pilot, and

so he got the book out and he opened it up. Well, as soon as he opened it up, that was his flight, that was a Nick, that's the same kind that I shot down, and so I said, "Oh," I said, "A friend of mine shot one of those down," "Oh," he said, "Where?" And so I pointed out approximately where it was. He said, "That had to be one of our squadron because we were the only ones flying that airplane in that whole southern part of Japan," and so I said, "Uh-oh, I should just shut up." But anyway, I didn't say anything more but he wanted to know when it was, the date. Well, I didn't have my log book, I couldn't remember that. But anyway, so we talked about a number of things. What he knew about the Corsair was fabulous, I tell you, he knew as much about Corsair as I did. But so we got together several other times. We found out we both liked to sing, and I knew a couple Japanese songs already that I had picked up, and so we practiced a little bit, and so he had a big party and he asked a bunch of his friends in, teachers that could speak English and so on, so we put on a little program. We sang duet songs, (laughs) got to know each other very well. And he took me to his hospital, and he was a thoracic surgeon, that's what he was, so he did a lot of operations and so on. So the last time that I saw him -- maybe not the last time but almost the last time -- I said, "I have to admit

something. I was the one that shot down your friend." He said, "I know," I said, "How'd you know?" He said, "You knew too much about it." (laughs) Well anyway, but he gave me his name, he gave the name of the gunner. He had all the pilots in his squadron listed and what happened to them. He really kept very good records. And so I have that at home yet, I have the name of the pilot that I'd shot down and so on. Made me feel a little bad in a way but that was sort of an interesting friendship. Then in about two days, I was back in the squadron, I was flying into Korea, and I went to 214, that was a fighter squadron flying Corsairs. And a few changes had been made in the Corsair since World War I and Korea. We got .20-millimeter cannons now in the F44 for Korea, a little higher power engine, a lot of difference in the cockpit and so on, but still basically the same airplane. So anyway, we were flying, we flew off of six different airfields in Korea depending on what was happening, and also then we flew off of the carrier, the aircraft carrier -- oh God, I'll think of it in a minute. The CO, the skipper of the ship, was Jimmy Thach, very famous aviator who developed Thach Weave and so on, and he was the skipper of that ship, and had a chance to interact with him a number of times, so we were on the -- oh God, I'm having a mental block here. But we

flew out of Bofu, Japan and six different fields in Korea and the carrier, and it was about one-third of time on the carrier and about two-thirds the time on land base approximately. A few highlights of flying in Korea was terrible, much worse than World War II. We had 15 guys from Minnesota in fighter squadrons over there. Of the 15, we came back a year later, nine of them did not return. That's over 50% loss. The weather was terrible over there. Of course, a lot of mountains and so on, and mountains and bad weather did not jive together. So we were really bad on pilot lossage. And one of the things that we were operating around was the Chosin Reservoir, which if you talk to any marines that are in the first marine division of course, that was one of the real headaches that they had. And we were told by a general over there by the name of MacArthur, said we'd be home by Christmas, and so we did not have our cold weather starting outfits. In Minnesota, we had the cold weather starting -- we'd been flying year-round. Over there, we didn't have it because we were going to be home by Christmas. We had a terrible time. First of all, the men that was working on airplanes, they were working right out in the open when it was below zero. Now, you know how hard it is working on engines, so those guys should have all had the congressional medal of honor, I'll

tell you, for what they did. But anyway, I remember one mission -- matter of fact, I wrote this up for this book we have -- only two of us could get our airplanes started that day. Now here they are, they were only about 70 miles from us, so we had a very short run there but they were up the mountains, so that meant they were a little higher than we were. One day, it was 20 below zero, we had to get our planes started, only two of us could get our engines started, because in order to start it, you had to drain the oil, heat the oil up, and then pour it back in. An airplane engine is so tight that you just won't start in cold weather, and you can hardly turn the prop on. Well anyway, we got it started, and I had six 500-pound bombs underneath my wings, fully loaded with ammo for the guns, I didn't have any rockets that day. But anyway, we had a 300-foot ceiling. Now, you can't drop bombs at that altitude. We had a squadron policy, you don't drop any bomb below 1000 feet but we only had a 300-foot ceiling, and rather than go through and take off all the bombs and put on rockets, I said, "Well, go ahead, we'll work something out," so two of us took off, and in order to get up to where the First Marine Division was, we had to fly up this mountain road. It was the only way we could keep the ground intact because there was no way for you to go up,

you can't look down in the mountains. Anyway, so we flew up so we'd have to have 30 to 40 degree flap in order to make turns back and forth and all this weight on the wings, you know, and so on, and finally we got there, we got our room, we checked in. I called the operator, the forward air controller, his name was Dunn Kirk 14, that was his call sign. So I called in and I told him what we had, we have two airplanes and one of them has rockets, one of them has bombs, and we're waiting for your information on what you want us to do. "Oh," he said, "are we ever happy to see you." That was the Chinese came in now, they were surrounded by Chinese, and on the way up, which we were flying up this mountain road, they were shooting at us constantly because you could see them all along the road but we surprised them. They figured no stupid aviators would be flying in a snowstorm. It was snowing so we were going (laughs) we got there. So we started circling them, and we could see the Chinese because they had white uniforms but the uniforms weren't pure white, they were sort of a yellowish, and they didn't realize how easy it was for us to spot them, so anyway, I told them this, I told Dunn Kirk. I said, "We can see some of the Chinese down there standing against trees and so on," so we circled and we had to use flaps all the time at high power

settings, so that means our fuel is going to be eaten up faster. So I told him if we could get rid of our ordinance, that'll save a lot of fuel for time, we could spend more time (inaudible), and that's what they needed because when we're flying around, the Chinese don't move, and they were all over the place. So they said, "If there's any way we can get --" "Oh," he said, "we got a couple mortars that are shooting up there from behind the hill and we can't get to them," so he gave me directions. So I said, "OK," so I went over there and I looked down, and I could see these guys, I couldn't see the mortars but anyway, I could see some of the guys. I said, "OK, I want to get rid of these bombs," but I said, "I'm at 300 feet," wasn't even a 300 feet then because (inaudible) liar, so anyway, I said, "I don't know what's going to happen but I'll give it a shot," so I looked at the terrain and I figured that I could pickle those 500-pound bombs and then dive for the ground, and the ground will protect -- because it was hilly -- ground protect, so that's what I did. So I went over and I got everything else squared away, and I put on full power, and then pickled these 500-pound bombs and then dove for the ground, and I got away with it. (laughs) But anyway, so then we circled for another two hours, and then we climbed up through the [soup?], went down over the

ocean, let down then got back in the field. Only two airplanes that got up there that day. And now, I'm going to move ahead while we're on that subject because 25 years later, I was at a historical meeting in Buffalo, Wyoming. And we were at a big table, it was a banquet, and there was a guy right across the table from me, and he had a Marine Corps tiepin on, and so I struck up a conversation with him, I said, "I see you're a former Marine," "Oh yeah," and I said, "Well, where?" He was in Korea. And he had been the First Marine Division. I said, "You were at the Chosin Reservoir," I said, "What was your job?" He said, "I was a forward air controller," I said, "What was your call sign?" (laughs) "Dunn Kirk 14." That was the guy that was controlling us. So anyway, I said, "Do you remember the day when it was snowing and these guys came over there, two of us, and we circled and we had bombs and rockets?" "Oh, yeah," he said. "Well," I said, "I was one of them." His mouth fell open, he jumped up out of his seat and ran the length of the table, came around, threw his arms around me, (laughs) and said -- well, I won't use this Marine Corps term, but anyway (laughs) he was really happy. So it's sort of interesting, sometimes -- I get a Christmas card, we trade Christmas cards yet, and sort of interesting when things go. Well, after we got back from Korea, I was

assigned -- a change of life took place. I was assigned to be a flight instructor at Pensacola, Florida, and I didn't want to do that. I wanted to get in jet squadron, but I didn't get it. I was at the very basic part of the new pilots going in, and I was training them to be a pilot, and I had really a lousy attitude, and I had gone all the way through flight training and I never had a single down, and I got down when I took my instructors (inaudible). And so if you'd get a down there, you got called into the CO -- CO was a full Navy commander -- and he says, "What in the hell happened to you?" I said, "I don't know, I just disagree with the philosophy of some of the things that are happening, you know, you're dealing with college-graduate kids here and you're treating them like elementary kids," "Well," he says, "What was the loss ratio on pilots when you went through?" I said, "About 30% is what I heard." He says, "It's four percent now, we've learned a few things." And this guy talked to me like a father and son operation, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. He said, "I'll tell you what. If you're very unhappy with this," and I told him I wanted to be in jet squadron, I didn't want this thing here, he said, "You come back in a week, we're going to give you three students after you pass this thing, it shouldn't be any problem," and he says, "If

you want to be out, I'll make sure your orders are written to go back to civilian life." Well, that's fair. So I went through and I passed this instrument reading for the instructors, and I got three students, worked with them for four days, and I went back to talk to him, and I said, "Forget about it. This is fun. I really enjoy it." That was the turning point of my life. I never would have been a teacher in high school or college if he hadn't lowered the boom on me. I needed it, and I deserved it. I deserved to have a good kick in the rear is what I really deserved. So that was so important right there. So anyway, I was down there for two years, flight instructor, and then I decided, "Well," I said, "I'm not going to be training kids to fly airplanes for the rest of my life, I want to go back to Iowa," so I did. The new National Park Service had just opened a new park called the Everglades in southern Florida. I said, "I want to see that while I'm down here because I might not be here again," so I took off from there and I went to South Florida, and I met an engineer in Okefenokee, a little town of Okefenokee, and he had taken six weeks off of his job and was going down there, and he was a birder. He was very interested in birds just like I was, and so the two of us teamed up and we went down there, and we spent about four days in

Everglades Park just chasing birds around, sort of interesting. While we're down there one morning, we spotted a peregrine falcon. I don't know if you know what that -- that's a hawk, and this peregrine falcon had nailed a bird and was eating it right on the beach. And we were watching, it was sort of interesting. Then we heard four other guys talking, and we couldn't figure out who in the world would be out here at this time of morning, it was 5:30 in the morning, you know. And you hear the voice of somebody else, "Nobody else would be freakish enough to come out and watch birds at that time," so anyway, so we finally spotted them and we started conversing and so on, and one of the guys said, "What do you guys do?" "Well," I said, "I just got out of the Marine Corps." He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know, I'm going back to Iowa," he said, "How would you like a job?" I said, "Like what?" Well, he says, "Bob" -- anyway, there was a guy by the name of, I'll think of it in a minute, but anyway, he was the biologist at Aransas Wildlife Refuge, and he just discovered he had terminal cancer, and so he said he's quitting work and "we need somebody down there right away, would you be interested?" And he says, "You've got the background credentials, you're interested in birds, and you've been in the Marine Corps so you (inaudible)," so

I said, "Well, I'll give it a whirl." He says, "Call John Baker," John Baker was the president of the National Audubon Society in New York. So I got to a telephone that afternoon and called him. He said the job was open, he says, "How soon can you be up here? I'd like to talk to you." Well, I said, "It's going to take me two weeks by the time I pick up my trailer at Pensacola and go back to Iowa." "Too much time, can you do it in a week?" "Well, I suppose I can," so I drove back to Iowa, went up to Minneapolis, picked up an airplane and flew it to New York and talked to him, talked to him for 10 minutes and had the job. I asked him, "Should I be armed?" "No," he said, "You can't take any arms." I thought to myself, I should never have asked the question because I was not going down there without being armed, and I have a .38 that was issued to me in the Marine Corps, and so anyway, I took one down, didn't say anything about it, never had to use it but I did show up one time though going through Missouri -- you're from Missouri -- I was driving to Pensacola near Hannibal, I'm trying to think of the name of the town, anyway, very close to Hannibal. It was in the evening, and I stopped for a cup of coffee and a sandwich, took off, I had to get my lights on, I turned my lights on, driving out of the -- I notice a car right behind me turned his lights on. I

didn't think anything about it but after we got out about five miles, this guy comes up along side of me. Like this. Look over, two guys in the car. Instead of passing, they stood right there. So I figure, well, I'll speed up, so I speeded up, they speeded up. I slowed down, they slowed down. I says, what in the world is this? So I had my .38 in my bag right behind, I reached behind, I got my .38, and the sun was setting, and I held the gun up like this -- boy, you never saw (inaudible) (laughs) so fast. I have no idea what they had in mind but anyway, it's the only time I've ever had to use or show it even. But anyway, so I spent two years in Pensacola, and enjoyed it thoroughly, and then I came back and then I talked to the superintendent I was telling you about that had (inaudible), you know, Morris Bye was his name, and we have a school today named Morris Bye, and he's an outstanding guy, just -- so we became very good friends, and so I worked there for 30 years teaching, and ended up I was in charge of all the science programs and science teachers, and retired about 1984, been retired ever since, and just keeping the farm going. We have a 15-acre farm there, and I do a lot of teaching and I teach classes on birds, teach classes on Lewis and Clark, historical classes, I teach

classes on World War II, and really have a good time. Oh. You got some questions.

KT: Yeah. You've pretty much covered everything as far as your experiences, and I think you covered it actually in very good detail. What I'm curious is that when you heard about the bomb, you just kind of brushed away, you said, "I heard about the bomb," and then you went on --

LB: The atomic bomb?

KT: Yes, sir. What was your reaction at that point? Were you relieved? How did you feel?

LB: Haven't thought about it for a long time. Well, course, when I read about the story of the tremendous fatalities and so on, and then later on I flew right through the streets of Hiroshima, and I saw the destruction, my God, I'll tell you, everything was gone. You could just see rubble piles, and so at that time when that thing took place, I said, "Jesus, that's terrible," you know, and where does it stop? Had no idea we were going to be ending up in a cold war operation with Russia wondering if they were going to drop a bomb on us and so on, but that was too far ahead, I didn't think of that. I don't know, I was happy that the war was over because we were ready to go out and I already knew that a lot of organizations and military people were getting ready to go into Japan, and God, you

could just see -- Japanese said "We're going to die for the emperor," you know, and that nobody's going to surrender, so it's going to be tens of thousands of people are going to be killed. And that part bothered me. But I was too shortsighted to really see what it would be like. It's almost like, say, for example, somebody takes hostages and they bury themselves in a big building or something, and you know in order to get those people out of there, it's going to take somebody that's going to get hurt. Might be law enforcement or be them, so on. So that's what I figured, that it was going to be bad news. But I don't know that I thought that much ahead of time, I figured, well, I'll be in this war for quite a while instead of having it over, so that was -- I suppose I felt relieved, I don't know. I just -- I can't explain really my feeling at that time. It's been a long time ago.

KT: When did you fly through Hiroshima? You mentioned flying through (inaudible) --

LB: Well, when I got to Japan, we were put in this pilot pool.

KT: We're talking about Korea.

LB: This is Korea, what did I say -- yeah. When we got to Japan, we were in the pilot pool, and that's when they wanted pilots for various things, and one of the things that I didn't mention, the artillery in Korea and VM06,

those are the airplanes that they use for spotting artillery, they needed those airplanes, and there was a bunch of them that were uncrated or unloaded in Tokyo. Why, I have no idea. So they needed six pilots to go up there and get six of those airplanes and fly them to [Kimpo?] immediately, so they asked for volunteers. So I volunteered. So six of us jumped in a plane, and this is all happening in a matter of minutes really, we jumped in a plane an hour later, and we took off for Tokyo. They flew us up there, we jumped out of the airplane, they had the airplanes all ready for us, we jumped in the planes and took off, and flew them all the way to -- let me see -- we flew to Iwakuni, Japan, that's where we had to get fuel there. Then we went across the Korean Straits, and we didn't have any life preservers. Now, that's 125 miles of water. And I was sort of leading the group, so I said, "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to fly out, climb up to about 10,000 feet before I start across that water, and if I have engine trouble in the first part, I'd turn around and go back. If it's the last part, I'll be able to reach the shore. I'm not going over all that water without a life preserver," and so that's what we did. Nobody had any problems, we got over there, we got our six airplanes to Kimpo, turned them loose, we jumped in another airplane,

flew us back to Japan. And that's when we went through Hiroshima. As we were coming down, we were flying down to get to Iwakuni, and we went right over Hiroshima, and we went right down -- I think some of us were only about 20 feet off the ground so you get a good view there. Whether we pick up any radiation or not, I don't know, that'd been about five years later so I wasn't worried about it. But anyway, any other questions?

KT: Yeah, I would just like to ask you, how did World War II shape you as a person? Did it benefit you, was it -- just explain to me your impression of World War II.

LB: Well, when I went into World War II, I was 18, and I don't think I was a mature person at 18. I think World War II fashioned me into an adult faster, much faster, than it would've if I hadn't gone in the military, and I think that's one of the advantages of the military. It matures people faster. I think that I've heard other guys say the same thing. And I suppose I changed a few views on killing, and I know when I shot down that Jap airplane, I had a feeling of guilt almost, the fact that I had shot that person down but I know in Korea, I did not have that feeling of guilt, and I saw, when I was using the 20-millimeters on Chinese troops, I could see some of the guys falling and so on, you know. Didn't seem to bother me.

But it did bother me on that Japanese, when I shot that plane down.

KT: Why do you think that was?

LB: I don't know, I don't know. But I've thought about it a little bit but of course, there, every Chinese guy that I got, I figured would save some of our guys, and the same thing was true of that Jap airplane but it wasn't the same. I don't know, maybe it was because this guy was trying to beat out the flames that made me feel bad. But I don't know, good question, (laughs) I can't give you an answer. But I do think the military helped me to grow up. And I think that, and I recommended this to a number of people. Matter of fact, when I was teaching, I had kids, or boys especially, and I said, "Did you ever think about the military?" Because I think they needed a little growing up. And I think that helped me. So I'm very much pro-military. Now, the military is not altogether the best thing, and it doesn't work for all people but I think overall, the military is very beneficial, especially to boys, to some girls as well, and it's just like you being in law enforcement, you know, there's a certain amount of pluses that goes with it and there's a certain amount of negativism, and that's true in every walk of life. I don't

think there's a single exception to that. So anyway,
that's -- (laughs)

KT: Well, before we close, is there anything you'd like to add?

LB: Well, I might say this, that after having lived -- I'm 85 right now -- and after living this 85 years, I feel that I'm very, very fortunate to have grown up in this country. I've been to a number of foreign countries, and they have some advantages and some disadvantages, but there's no place that has the overall advantages that we have in this country. One country that I've been in that I think highly of is Costa Rica, I've been to -- it's fabulous. I thought Japan had so many pluses to it now that they've lost this idiotic view of dying for the emperor all the time. And I enjoyed Japan very much but Costa Rica is one of my favorite countries. I've been to England and so on but there's advantages -- the best big city I've ever been in is London but overall, it's hard to beat the U.S. as far as a country to grow up in. And I feel that I've been so fortunate, I had good parents, I haven't agreed with my -- my father, by the way, was a Ku Klux Klanner, and he and I went round and round in circles, and I found that out -- I didn't realize that but he was 19, 20, 21 when he was in the Klan, and so he and I disagreed on a number of things but overall, I think my parents were very good, and I just

think I'm very lucky to have grown up in this country, to live this long, I try to keep myself physically and mentally in good health. By the way, something I didn't think about in Korea, I was scheduling pilots, and I had five guys in our squadron that came in and begged me not to put him down for flights that were going over 10,000 feet, they couldn't breathe. Smokers. Didn't bother us in World War II because guys hadn't been smoking that long but see, some of these guys that had started smoking in high school and then they've smoked now 10 years, and it takes that long to destroy the alveolar cells in the lungs, which are the ones that take the oxygen and put it in the blood, and now they have gotten five guys in our squadron -- well now, Colonel Feeley, who was our CO, just an outstanding guy, he and I had to sit down and write this to the Department of Defense about pilots now that were opting out, now it became a national defense policy, and if you remember, in 1964 when the surgeon general had his report out, one of the top things was smoking by pilots and what it was doing, and immediately, the military did not put any free cigarettes in any more of those boxes because we used to get a box, you know, with all our meals, you know, free cigarettes in every one of them. They stopped that immediately, and they went to a law, and the military was

one of the first ones that went to no smoking in certain parts of the -- they used to have signs about no smoking around airplanes but I mean, they completely abolished that. So that was one of the things that came out about smoking, so I've been an avid non-smoker, and I smoked cigars for almost 20 years now, and now it's a different ball game. I'm happy to see what's happened. I never thought I'd see that. So that's good. OK. Any other questions?

KT: That's it, Colonel Bradley, I thank you for your time and for your service.

LB: Oh, good, well, thank you.

END OF AUDIO FILE