

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Bob Bloomfield

Date of Interview: February 7, 2010

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Interview in progress.

Michael Franklin: Alright, this is Michael Franklin, and today is February 7, 2010 and I'm interviewing Mr. Bob Bloomfield at his daughter's 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, the Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. Now to start out with, Bob, where and when were you born?

Mr. Bloomfield: How about that, Yonkers, New York which is a suburb of New York City.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: May 8, 1924.

Michael Franklin: And what were your parents' names?

Mr. Bloomfield: Mabel (sp?); her maiden name...Anderson (sp?); that's my middle name. And my father's name regrettably for him was Clarence (sp?). His...his mother's maiden name was Rugg, R-u-g-g, so he was Clarence Rugg Bloomfield, and he hated it. And he enlisted in the Navy in World War I almost at the conclusion of that war, and...I guess maybe because he hadn't been baptized he thought he could tell the Navy what his name

was...what he preferred his name to be, and he signed on the Navy as C. Robert Bloomfield. And I suspect that is why I was called Robert...from the get go because he was called Bob in the Navy. And subsequent to the war, his Navy acquaintances called him Bob. His family nicknamed...he was the youngest of four kids, and I guess they were pretty close together; his nickname was "Click," because those two sisters who were close to him couldn't say Clarence; it came out Click.

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: So that was his name. And I have a...my sixth son who's Burk's (sp?) brother...

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...just older than Burk; he's named Click.

Michael Franklin: His birth name is Click?

Mr. Bloomfield: That's...that's his serious (?) name, C-O-I-C, yeah.

Michael Franklin: So your father...served at the end of World War I; he didn't...he didn't see combat then?

Mr. Bloomfield: No combat; he was...he was...he was stationed...maybe ten miles from home, and he never left that place. I don't think he was in even...more than a year, but he developed some great friendships...

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...which went on and on and on. Uh, so...

Michael Franklin: Do you think those friendships and stories inspired...you to join the Navy?

Mr. Bloomfield: I had a...my mother's brother was in the Navy; he was on a destroyer. He was an Ensign; he was a Gunnery officer and he did convoy duty in the...in the Atlantic, so I had Navy...kind of born into me, if you will. And I had aviation in my mind from my earliest recollections. The fact that Lindbergh made that flight which I think maybe was 1929; I've forgotten the date.

Michael Franklin: (Unintelligible words).

Mr. Bloomfield: But I knew about that; I was five years old and...and I was aware of it. And because of my interest, on my eighth birthday, my father took me to a local airport, and he wouldn't go up in the airplane, but he brought along a cousin, a girl who was probably five, six years my senior, and she and I got in the rear seat; I sat in her lap...in an open, two-seater bi-plane. And I guess for fifteen or twenty minutes, we flew around Westchester County, so that was my...my first introduction to...to flight at the age of eight. And when I was thirteen, he bought me another...similar experience, but this time I didn't have to sit on my cousin's lap; I got in the back seat by myself. The reason for that being...this was a reward...for the fact that I had been the Boy Scout...in the Village of Larchmont where we lived, who had the most promotions...who had made the...yeah, the great...the greatest increase in...scouting rank...

Michael Franklin: Got it.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...in a year; it was the minimum time that you could become a Life Scout.

Michael Franklin: It was called a Life Scout at that time?

Mr. Bloomfield: Right, it was just under Eagle.

Michael Franklin: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: So as a reward I got another...trip...around the patch; it probably cost two dollars or maybe three dollars.

Michael Franklin: Yeah, in a single prop...bi-plane?

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh yeah.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: Again, an open cockpit, bi-plane.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: And in school, whenever there was an...an order...an assignment to take a subject and write about it, I always wrote about aviation, aviators. (humming in the background). Uh, Wylie Post who wore a patch over one eye; Admiral Byrd; Glenn Curtiss; I mean, I knew them all. So when war started, there was no question in my mind that I had to be an aviator and I had to be in the Navy. And I don't know how much time you got, Mike, but...

Michael Franklin: Just as much time as you need.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...I'm a storyteller.

Michael Franklin: Alright, that's good! So, okay...

Mr. Bloomfield: So anyway, December 7th, 1941 I had...I had finished boarding school in June...that year, and because I had just turned seventeen...my sixteenth birthday was...uh, a month before the end of school...my senior year. Uh, and I had hoped to go to Brown. I was in a Massachusetts boarding school, and the recommendations of the...guidance guy at Mt. Herman, the school I attended, and...and the...admissions office at Brown suggested that because of my youth, it might be a good idea to take a year; do something; get a job and then come back a year later when I'd be a year older.

Michael Franklin: Right.

Mr. Bloomfield: I always suffered for the fact that I was...a year less in development than my peers.

Michael Franklin: Did...is that because you started school a year earlier or you were advanced...

Mr. Bloomfield: I...

Michael Franklin: ...a grade?

Mr. Bloomfield: ...I...I went to kindergarten at the age of five; I was five in May of...of...whatever that year was...19... '29, so in September, I went to kindergarten. And at the conclusion of the day, which I guess was a half a day, they sent me out to meet my mother with a note. And the next day she came into school with me, and I wound up in first grade (chuckles), and I have no idea what caused that. Obviously, I must have expressed some things in such a manner that they decided that I didn't

belong in kindergarten, and I regretted it...not early on, but...let's say from high school on, I realized that here I was a year younger than all these guys...

Michael Franklin: Which is a big difference in high school.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...and these girls; yeah, no question about it. Uh, my...my sophomore year...this is the year that I went to boarding school...I went out for football; I weighed a hundred and forty-five pounds, and it was murder! (chuckles) Because as a sophomore, I was not only competing with and against and practicing against my own...sophomore peers, but juniors and seniors, and you know, they were two hundred pounders...some of them...

Michael Franklin: (Unintelligible words).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...it was tough!

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: Anyway, December 7th, I had been working...for...let's say the equivalent of H.E.B...

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...and I think in the east the stores are still there called the A&P; it was the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company.

Michael Franklin: Yeah. It's a grocery store chain.

Mr. Bloomfield: So on...yeah, yeah...super...and they started supermarkets.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: The early proponent of...of supermarket...method of marketing.

Michael Franklin: Huh!

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, on December 8th, Monday, with a buddy I went to New York to the Army Air Corp. Even though I was seventeen, they would take your application and pending the outcome physically and...and, I guess with a written test, I'm not sure about that because I didn't get that far, but it...when...when you became eighteen they give you orders. Anyway...make this quick, because there's still three and a half years of war still to come. My buddy who was a couple of years older than I was thrown out because he couldn't pass the vision test; I mean, he could see the big "E" and a couple of lines but it wasn't satisfactory; he wasn't twenty-twenty.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: And I discovered that I was color blind.

Michael Franklin: Ohh!

Mr. Bloomfield: That was some blow!

Michael Franklin: I...I could imagine.

Mr. Bloomfield: I mean...color blind...you don't fly, okay? And I wasn't totally, but they called it "red-green" blind.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: So on my return home, it was a hundred miles away...'cause we...my family now had moved to the eastern end of Long Island; a little village called East Hampton. I reported to my mother and father with great disappointment the fact that...I'm color blind. My father had a friend

who was an executive of something called A Better Vision Institute of America; he got a hold of...and gave to my father...the book of color plates. It was like an...an eight by eleven, maybe a little bit bigger...like a coffee table book; they still use the same one today. The first plate is a...red twelve on a blue ground, and I had it memorized, and there were probably thirty pages in it.

Michael Franklin: You say you had to memorize every single page?

Mr. Bloomfield: Exact...pages were not numbered...then this is *key* to what happened. Uh, at that time, the Navy required two years of college and a minimum age of twenty, so I was seventeen...it was a *long ways* from the Navy! And I couldn't wait to get in the war like so many of us; I mean, that's what it was all about.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: We gone to war; we got to get involved! Uh, so the Army Air Corps says, "Sorry, Pop, you're color blind; you can't fly." In March of '42, *desperate*, without telling my mother and father, I took a day off and went back into New York and went to the recruiting office of the Royal Canadian Air Force. They sent me around the corner to a doctor; I passed the physical; he never gave me the color charts. I was disappointed because I knew every...

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...(unintelligible) the numbers were. And when I got back to the...to the guy who was running the office, he handed me a bunch of papers and he

said, “Bob, all we need to do,” he...he said, “you...you know, you got passed with flying colors; everything’s fine.” Had to show him a high school diploma, uh (pause), but he says, “you need to take this paperwork home and have either your mom or your dad sign them.” So, at the appropriate moment after dinner, a couple of days later, I said, “I got something we got to talk about,” and I started to talk about the Royal Canadian Air Force, and my father said, “Mabel, you would please put on another pot of coffee?” He said, “We’re going to have some conversation here.” And he excused himself and he got up and got a bottle of brandy and a cigar and he fired up. So he says, “Tell me about it.” So I told him, “You know, I...I don’t know what I’m going to do; I’m going to Canada and I’m going to learn to fly and then I’m going to go to Britain.” RCF was flying...

Michael Franklin: Yeah, they were flying...

Mr. Bloomfield: ...yeah right.

Michael Franklin: ...in part of Britain.

Mr. Bloomfield: Well, this didn’t take me very long to explain, and it didn’t take him very long. So the coffee pot came back out...to tell me in...in some pretty strong language that he was terribly proud of fact that this is something that I wanted to do. He knew about my love for flying, and he knew how disappointed I was to find out I was color blind and it didn’t seem to make any difference to the RCF, but he said, “Please understand this, Son. We will support you as long as you get involved

with some U.S. military forces, but you're not going to go fly for Canada. So your mother or I are not signing this paperwork." Well, that's a blow.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: So that was March. Early April, and at that time, the A&P was opening additional supermarkets and because...I was an executive...I was...I was head of the...of the...dairy department; I was the manager of the dairy department; I'm still seventeen years old.

Michael Franklin: Still seventeen.

Mr. Bloomfield: And I...originally I was working for eighteen dollars a week, and when I...they...my...my boss, the guy who was manager of the dairy department became a Naval aviator, a Cadet, and he left...so I became manager and...and they raised me from eighteen dollars to twenty-seven dollars a week which was *huge* money! Really!

Michael Franklin: That's considerable at that time.

Mr. Bloomfield: I mean I...I never wanted for anything; I had a car and because I traveled for the A&P, I got a...a...what was called a "C-3" Gas Ration coupon; gas was rationed. And people who had "A" coupons got three gallons a week. And I've forgotten what my dose was with the C-3, but it was significantly more. Anyway, I was...up in...in western Long Island just outside of New York City setting up a dairy department and training people, and I was staying in a Garden City hotel and I had a phone call from my mother. She said, "Have you heard the news?" I said, "What

news?" She said, "The Navy's announced that they're going to take eighteen year olds and they're only going to require a high school diploma..."

Michael Franklin: *Phew!*

Mr. Bloomfield: ...and my birthday's a month away. And my birthday fell on either a Friday or a Saturday, May 8th, and on that following Monday I was back in New York, 120 Broadway, at the Naval Aviation Cadet...whatever it was called. So we start going through the process; we're all down to shorts and T-shirts, and they're thumping us and...doing whatever and...all of a sudden I realize I'm in a...in a line...where guys are sitting down and looking at this color book. And I've got to describe this to you. Uh, there was...there was a bank of windows to my left and a window behind me and this long table sat there and there was a Corpsman sitting facing the windows...with the book. So I sat down at the prescribed seat for the...applicants and he opened the book and I said, "Twelve," and he turned a page and I said...whatever it was..., "Thirty-seven," and I was much too quick. So he...'cause man, I was sharp; he knew I...didn't have a problem.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle), he knew you were...you were saying the number before the...

Mr. Bloomfield: So he took his pencil and he stuck it in book and flopped over...I don't know how many pages...(pause). So I looked at the book and I couldn't see what was there, but I'd been practicing with this thing now for four months, so I picked it up because I had found that I'd get a light

reflection sometimes...pick up the correct numbers. He said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Get the book down." I said, "Man, it was my birthday over the weekend and we had some kind of party going on and...I'm having a little trouble seeing this morning."

Michael Franklin: (Chuckles).

Mr. Bloomfield: "Oh!" So he stuck his pencil in again and flopped it over, he said, "What do you see there?" So I looked at it for awhile, and I said, "Eighty-seven?"...with a question mark. And he took the pencil that was in his hand, and he went like this (making a motion); I said, "Thirty-five." He said, "That's good; let's try another one."

Michael Franklin: He traced it?

Mr. Bloomfield: And this guy was *not* my cousin!

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: I had no clue...as to who he was. We do one more; I don't know what it was. He traced it with his pencil; he says, "Okay." So I'm a Naval Aviation Cadet.

Michael Franklin: So the third time is the charm for you.

Mr. Bloomfield: Wow! I mean, I couldn't believe it!

Michael Franklin: Now why do you think he did that?

Mr. Bloomfield: I have no idea!

Michael Franklin: Because at this time...

Mr. Bloomfield: And...

Michael Franklin: ...I mean, there's not a shortage of people.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...you know, we had...lots of applicants who were...

Michael Franklin: That's right.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...I mean, there was probably a hundred of us going through there that day. Uh, (pause)...

Michael Franklin: But so he...

Mr. Bloomfield: ...so anyway, I'm through with the process, and they say, "Go back home and we'll send you order." And on maybe the first of August I got orders...to report back there on the, I think, the 19th of August. And we went to Pennsylvania Station; got on a train and went to Raleigh, North Carolina and then were transported by busses to the campus of... University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. We had, in the country at that time, four pre-flight schools. The Navy set up pre-flight schools which were essentially academic and athletic; spent half a day in Ground School; a half a day getting banged and bruised and a lot of competitive athletics, and a grueling obstacle course, but it was a great experience.

Michael Franklin: Is this in...in lieu of boot camp because you're...you have to be an officer to pilot, right?

Mr. Bloomfield: Yes, no, yeah, yeah...uh, Naval Aviation Cadets, at that time, were ranked with Midshipmen at Annapolis, you know? We weren't officers but we weren't enlisted. However, if you washed out as a...as a Cadet, you became a Seaman Second Class (chuckle) and they sent you to Great Lakes or somewhere. But just...as an interesting...passing, on the train with me and these other guys and I...I don't know how many we

were, but we...we had two or three cars...(unintelligible words), we sat up...overnight on the way to Raleigh...uh, George Bush was on that train.

Michael Franklin: Really?!

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah! And...and I...

Michael Franklin: (Unintelligible words).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...and I didn't know it and I didn't know him, but I know from reading his book, the book he wrote after...right after the war, that he...describing his aviation Cadet experiences was on that train with me because he talked about going through the same physical that I did, and he was a member of the Thirteenth Battalion at Chapel Hill. And later on we...also were in the same place. But further...everyone was put into a platoon, well, twenty Cadets, twenty-two...whatever it was. My platoon officer was Jerry Ford.

Michael Franklin: Really?!

Mr. Bloomfield: Yes! So, and I saw a lot of him...uh, up until 1994.

Michael Franklin: Was...he was a fighter pilot...or?

Mr. Bloomfield: No, no, he was...he was a jock.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: He'd been a...he...he was an All-American...

Michael Franklin: He was a football player, right?

Mr. Bloomfield: ...football player at Michigan, and like a lot of guys, they got reserve commissions. Matter of fact, the head of the Athletic Department at Chapel Hill...of the Navy...Athletic Department...was the coach of the

Fordham...1941 Rose Bowl football team. Fordham University in New York City...

Michael Franklin: Where...where Vince Lombardi started.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...a little (unintelligible words) school; went to the Rose Bowl in 1941. That guy's name was Jim Crowley; they called him Sleepy Jim.

Michael Franklin: Yeah!

Mr. Bloomfield: And...and...as Cadets...that summer of 1942 and the fall, he had maybe twelve or thirteen of his Fordham football players as Cadets because the...the pre-flight schools had a regular schedule with major college football teams; very few of those guys made it through the program. Matter of fact, only one that I know of; they were great athletes, but they didn't make it through the total of the flight training...procedure. So anyway, thirteen weeks at Chapel Hill; then got assigned with a group of twenty to go to Hutchinson, Kansas where there were twenty Cadets from the University of Georgia pre-flight school. All of us at Chapel Hill were North Easterners – New York, Boston, that...ilk.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: All the guys from Georgia were from Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, Carolinas – rednecks, and...and for three months during primary flight training, the...the physical training that we had gotten at...pre-flight school – hand-to-hand combat, boxing...came in real handy because the twenty group from the south and the twenty group from the north were always involved in some kind of mayhem! I mean, we hated each other.

Michael Franklin: Physical altercations?

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh yeah! Oh, bloody.

Michael Franklin: Really?

Mr. Bloomfield: Not to the point where anybody got thrown out, but it was...it was a serious...rehash of the...of the Civil War!

Michael Franklin: (Laughter), a miniature civil war.

Mr. Bloomfield: Right. So we...so we flew Stearman aircraft were which were open-cockpit bi-planes called *Yellow Perils*; they're all painted yellow. Great experience! I mean, first...first day...you're sitting in the airplane; guy takes you up and he says, "You got it." You start flying! Eight or nine hours of instruction; you solo. And we got...we got there around the 20th of November and Kansas had a particularly cold winter that year, and we were flying in these open-cockpit Stearmans in January with heavy sheepskin-lined leather flight clothing so that you could hardly move the stick around in the cockpit.

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: I mean, it was cold; it was really cold! And having...having passed all of the necessary check-rides, we got orders to Corpus Christi, Texas.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: And I was there from February until graduating on the 5th of June. I got my commission; got my wings, and at that time, I was the youngest Naval Aviator ever designated.

Michael Franklin: Because at that time you were eighteen?

Mr. Bloomfield: My...well, no, I'd been...I...my nineteenth birthday was...

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...four weeks before, so I had just become nineteen. And the records show that...that nobody had ever gotten his wings that young...because I was obviously in...in with some of the early eighteen year olds. However, four days later...we were graduating guys down there four or five times a month, on...I think the 9th...I graduated on the 5th of June...on the 9th, George Bush graduated and he was still eighteen. I think his birthday is the 12th of June.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckles).

Mr. Bloomfield: So I no longer...I no longer had that distinction.

Michael Franklin: So your...your paths were very close then?

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh yeah, yeah. And once again, I didn't know him.

Michael Franklin: Well...

Mr. Bloomfield: But he was there. And...having a...a yearbook from Corpus Christi...there were probably six hundred or eight hundred Cadets in this particular yearbook, and you could look through it and see a picture of George on his birthday and his graduation date and here's mine and he, you know, he...he beat me out...that...that was not a particular distinction; it just so happened.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckles), yeah. Well you had the record for four days then.

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, (laughter), exactly, right! Uh, so I guess I...I think we got...maybe a ten-day leave or something and I was home and then reported to

Jacksonville, Florida and immediately was assigned to an outlying field in a little town called Green Cove Springs...uh, oh, how did I happen to become a fighter pilot designee? I don't know. Whenever they asked me what I wanted to do...I wanted to fly off a carrier and I wanted to be a fighter pilot. And the...those questions were put to you from time to time, but I said to you before we ever turned a machine on, we were pretty cocky bunch and...and once you had that distinction of being selected for fighter training, we got worse I'm sure. You know the guys that...that wound up flying torpedo bombers and...and dive bombers...they were skilled; they went through the same training we did, but we were a breed...we were a breed apart, I assure you.

Michael Franklin: Your...your job is to...specifically engage...

Mr. Bloomfield: Just no question about it.

Michael Franklin: ...wow!

Mr. Bloomfield: So we...we got...we got introduced immediately to the Grumman Wildcat which was designated F4F, and that was, at that time, I'm now talking...June, late June, July and August of 1943. It was still the frontline fighter in the Pacific, but the Hellcat, the F6F, was...was being...sent out in great numbers replacing the Wildcat.

Michael Franklin: The Hellcat was a little bit faster and...

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh indeed; a great deal faster; bigger, stronger, not quite as maneuverable, but I...I think the Wildcats had a twelve hundred horsepower engine and Hellcats had a two thousand horsepower engine.

Michael Franklin: Hmm.

Mr. Bloomfield: Big different!

Michael Franklin: Yeah. Did you...do you know what the horsepower of the Japanese Zeros was?

Mr. Bloomfield: Significantly less, but they were so light. A fully...a fully loaded...Hellcat probably weighed between twelve and fourteen thousand pounds; I'm talking about full gas and full ammunition.

Michael Franklin: Right.

Mr. Bloomfield: And of course, we had armor plate behind the seats; under the seats we had self-sealing gas tanks. Zeros had nothing like that, and a...and a Zero ready for combat maybe weighed six thousand, seven thousand pounds at best, so they didn't...they didn't need the horsepower.

Michael Franklin: Right, okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: And they were a good deal more maneuverable...than the Hellcat, but the Hellcat was so strong...that, I mean, you know the numbers; you know...you know the tremendous superiority that we developed and the...and the ratio of...U.S. downed to Jap...was like fifteen or sixteen to one. But anyway, we spent...we spent two and a half months at Green Cove Springs. And of course the transition to a fighter...is you read the handbook and you sit in a cockpit and familiarize yourself with everything that's there, and one day...they say, "Go fly." There's no instructor...in the back or the front. But the training had just, you know, it...it made it pretty easy; there's no question about it. We put in about a

hundred hours...a lot of it called Bounce Drill, Field Carrier Landing Practice. They have a...a Landing Signal Officer standing on the end of a runway and they'd have sketched out with white paint, the equivalent of a flight deck, and we'd...hours, and hours, and hours of bounce drill is what it was called.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle).

Mr. Bloomfield: Because you'd come around and pick up the Signal Officer; you'd land, and immediately take off. It's called a Touch and Go Landing, and go back in a circle and do it over and over and over and over. So at the conclusion of that training period, we got sent to Glenview, Illinois. And out in the...in...in Lake Michigan was a...converted paddlewheel lake steamer; there were two of them. One of them was called the Wolverine; the other was called the Charger, and I...and I think that I qualified on the Wolverine. We...we...we had to go there and make eight carrier landings and take offs...before you get assigned to a squadron; it was called Carrier Qualifications.

Michael Franklin: It was basically just a flat barge to...

Mr. Bloomfield: And...and this...

Michael Franklin: ...(unintelligible) account for waves and...

Mr. Bloomfield: ...this...this flight deck was pretty small as you can imagine on a...on a lake steamer.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: So they take one airplane aboard at a time. And I had the good fortune of being able to make eight landings and take offs all in the same day. Actually, I think we sat there maybe for two or three days waiting for terrible weather to pass, and this was in...late August...of '43. So we got orders, finally after sitting out...sweating out this rain...to fly out, and I guess an instructor must have lead us out...and I don't know how many of us there were...probably half a dozen. And a...and a couple of them...didn't have enough time to get in the eight, but I was fortunate enough to have...completed it...all in the same day; same flight. You'd land aboard, and a crew would come out and back you all the way to the stern and then you'd...wait for the take off guy, and then you have the length of the deck...maybe four hundred feet...to get off...and then back in a circle and come back and make another landing.

Michael Franklin: Do the same thing.

Mr. Bloomfield: So then immediately home...on a leave, and with orders to report to the Naval Air Station at Coronado, San Diego. And the assumption, of course, is that you're going to report to a squadron that's in the formation stages; you're going to go through a lot of training with that squadron and eventually be assigned to a carrier and off you go to war. Well, I had a very close buddy and he, too, had finished the Car...Carrier Qualifications in...in one day; same day, same flight I was on, and we both had orders to report to Coronado. We both had gotten married; he before we went to Jacksonville, and my girlfriend came down to

Jacksonville from New York and we wound up getting married because it was the thing to do.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle).

Mr. Bloomfield: Nineteen...we got married.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: My father who always managed to get things done...I had orders to go to San Diego. You couldn't get on a train and...'cause there were no flights in those days; my father got us reservations on the premier train from New York to Chicago called the Twentieth Century Limited; got us a bedroom. Chicago we transferred to the Santa Fe Chief; had a bedroom and had a great trip...

Michael Franklin: Oh wow!

Mr. Bloomfield: ...in first class accommodations! He always...

Michael Franklin: Two very famous trains!

Mr. Bloomfield: ...he...he always managed to find a guy who knew a guy who knew a guy...

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...and we wound up with reservations on those two trains. And the...and the Chief quit at L.A. and then you took a local down to San Diego. Anyway, Jack and Doris had driven out from Ohio; his name was Jack Dunn (sp?), and unfortunately we lost him about four years ago. And the four of us, before we reported, before Jack and I reported, because

we still had...another twenty-four hours or something like that...we...looking for housing. We figured we'll be there...

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...you know, we're going to get assigned...to some squadron and some training...somewhere in the San Diego area. And we found a hotel kind of up on a hillside and it was called the Embassy...eleven dollars a week...for a room with a bath and we figured we could afford that. So the...the...at the appropriate moment Jack and I reported to...the Duty Officer at Coronado Naval Air Station; had a physical. For some reason they didn't give me a color test; I never had another color test.

Michael Franklin: Just the one.

Mr. Bloomfield: Just the one, yeah.

Michael Franklin: Did...

Mr. Bloomfield: So we got...we got, you know, we got through the...the initial processing and were told to standby because they had orders for us that were being transcribed.

Michael Franklin: Right away?

Mr. Bloomfield: Right away, right. So we hung around; maybe took a couple hours, and we get the orders and we are both to report...to the port authority...at San Pedro for transpiration to Fray, F-r-a-y. We didn't know where Fray was or what Fray was; had no clue! And obviously we go back to the girls, and we say, "We've got some bad news."

Michael Franklin: (Chuckles).

Mr. Bloomfield: Because we had...we had forty-eight hours to report to San Pedro...which I guess is a little bit north of San Diego; the girls wound up spending six weeks there before they could get transportation out. We wound up with two other...friend of Winson's (sp?) loading on a fleet tanker called the USS Cascasev (sp?), and we took off; left the dock. The tanker's carrying six hundred thousands of gallons or whatever of hundred octane aviation fuel, and we leave San Pedro harbor and...we're kind of looking around and, you know, where's the escort; where are the destroyers...or whoever's going to take us to Fray?! Unescorted! Six days to Pearl Harbor; Fray was Pearl Harbor.

Michael Franklin: Okay. So the...the tanker's unescorted?

Mr. Bloomfield: Unescorted; doing a zig zag...

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...course all the way out, and we became comfortable after the first twenty-four hours talking to the...deck officers who'd been doing this, I guess, for some time. And the...the key to this is that on the cargo deck...of this tanker were four brand new Hellcats being transported to be assigned to some squadron. They had canvas covers over them, and I went to the Cargo officer and I got his okay to get somebody to remove the covers. The four of each picked an airplane and we spent...four or five days or a portion of four or five...sitting in the cockpits of the airplane we'd only seen pictures of and heard of the F6F Hellcat, and that's the way you get yourself ready to fly a new airplane. You sit in

the cockpit and you get totally familiar where...everything is. So we got to Pearl and we got orders to report to...Fighting Squadron Six on Maui; we get down there and we find out that the Skipper of the squadron is a guy named Butch O'Hair. Now I don't know what you know about...naval aviation; Butch O'Hair was the first Navy pilot to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor as a result of having shot down...five Jap bombers and protecting the Carrier Lexington from probably getting sunk.

Michael Franklin: Was this during Midway?

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, that was...that was...huh?

Michael Franklin: Was that...the Battle of Midway or...

Mr. Bloomfield: No, no; Coral Sea.

Michael Franklin: Coral Sea, okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, which is way before Mid...it was four months before Midway; Midway was June of '42. This is February; I mean the war was two months old.

Michael Franklin: Yeah, one of the first engagements; one of the first...

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, right. And the Lexington was sunk not too long after that as a matter of fact. But anyway, from before the time that I became an Aviation Cadet which was, you know, May I took the...the physical and passed the color thing and...August 20th I'm in Chapel Hill. We all knew who Butch O'Hair was; he was a legend already. So here Jack and I wind up in his squadron which was just unbelievable. And of course, it

was unbelievable that we were *here*; we had just got through flight school!

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle).

Mr. Bloomfield: We had a total of three hundred hours, and we're in a squadron.

Michael Franklin: And by that point, how many...how many weeks had you been married?

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, less than two months.

Michael Franklin: Right.

Mr. Bloomfield: We were married on the 9th of July and we...and we left San Diego...or San Pedro around the 5th or 6th of September. The squadron had...had just come back from the first...carrier raids of '43 on Marcus Island; I think that was August 31st. So we joined thirty-four or thirty-five other pilots. Squadrons were normally thirty-six fighter aircraft, and here...these...these are now combat veterans because they'd been out on a two-day foray...strafing an island that really wasn't of any great significance. It was a training exercise primarily for a task group comprised of, uh, Essex CV number nine, the first Essex class carrier; twenty-seven thousand tons of displacements and two or three Independence class carriers which were ten thousand ton original cruis...light cruiser hulls, and at sometime in...in, I guess, late 1940 or '41, the decision was made to take...maybe fifteen or twenty of these light cruiser hulls that were either on the ways or on the drawing board and convert them to fast carriers because it, you know, cruisers had the

capability of doing thirty knots. So here we had a whole new series of fighting carriers, but small.

Michael Franklin: Smaller for...flight deck and...

Mr. Bloomfield: Shorter flight deck; much narrower. Flight deck on an Essex class carrier was something like ninety-five feet; these were seventy or seventy-two. And...it just so happened that...that VF-6, Fighting Squadron Six, which was Butch's squadron, didn't have a carrier, (pause) so it was divided into three, twelve-plane groups. And when...when [USS] Independence, [USS] Cowpens and [USS] Belleau Wood, these are three Independence class carriers, when they got out to the Pacific, their complement was twelve fighters, maybe nine dive bombers and nine or twelve torpedo bombers -TBFs, SBDs, and twelve Hellcats. Well, decision was made that they would get rid of the dive bombers and they were...replaced those with twelve more Hellcats. So Butch's squadron was divided into three-twelve plane groups. I had the...the distinction, if you will, or the pleasure or the excitement being Tail-end Charlie in Butch's division. The basic tactical...group in naval aviation is a four-plane division comprised of a Division Leader and his Wing man, Second Section Leader and his Wing man. Tail-end Charlie is obviously...is a Wing man of the Second Section Leader. And...with...the...the day we reported to Maui and to the squadron which was conceivably the 16th or 17th of September...

(end of tape 1, side A)

Michael Franklin: Alright, it should be good.

Mr. Bloomfield: So that first day we reported and it...and it was reasonably early in the morning and...and the Duty Officer says, "Well, you ever seen an F6F?" And we said...Jack...Jack and I both were there together...we said, "Well, we had an opportunity on the tanker coming over and we sat in the cockpits for a couple of days." "Well," he said, "you know, before we let you fly, you're going to have to take a blindfold cockpit check-out, so here's a handbook and you probably want to sit some more time sitting in the cockpits. You go down the line and get in an airplane." Uh, we said, "Who does the blindfold check-outs?" "Oh," he says, "any one of us." I said, "Can you get somebody to do it today?" He says, "You want to take the blindfold check-out today?" I said, "Yeah, we're ready; we flew that day." Having...having passed the blindfold check-out, we were assigned an airplane and a guy was going to take us up and fly us...show us...Maui...essentially.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: So the first day we reported to the squadron, we flew the airplane which was sensational; it really was, and it...and it was such a...different airplane from the Wildcat.

Michael Franklin: Did...did it take awhile to get used to it?

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, it didn't take long to get used to it; it was just such fun and so much more. It was...it was exciting! The cockpit was bigger to start with; we had more room in it. In the Wildcat...one of the terrible things...had very

close landing gear, and it was not hydraulic; had to crank it up; it was thirty turns; here on the right-hand side of the cockpit, and you kept bumping your elbow against the seat, and God help you if you let it go because it had no stop on it; it would just unwind, you know, like a...like a...

Michael Franklin: So you'd have wind it and then it would click and lock into place?

Mr. Bloomfield: Exactly, yeah, and then you put a manual lock on it, too, as a matter of fact. And one of the things we always had fun...if we were on the ground and a...and a flight was taking off ...early on in...in Green Cove Springs, and we started training in the Wildcats...if...if you weren't flying...you're usually on the line critiquing other guy's departures or landings or what have you, and you'd see...plane after plane...after breaking ground and taking off, and the plane would start going like this and like this (showing movement of the plane) because the guy's winding the thing up.

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: And he's kind of letting the airplane fly itself. But anyway with, you know, the F6F...you had a switch; your gear came up and when you wanted to let it down, you hit a switch and it goes down. Uh, (pause) anyway, this was...this was...mid-September; we flew everyday...gunnery runs; tactics; formations, tight formations, flying, and probably...I can't...I can't site the specific date, but it had to have been no later than the 30th of September...we get orders and we fly up to

Ford Island which...Pearl Harbor, and then fly out to the Independence. Uh, and we wind up on the 5th and 6th of October...with [USS] Essex, Cowpens, Independence, maybe [USS] Yorktown which was also a CV, an Essex class carrier, and we...and we carried out two days of raids on Wake Island, and our duties were primarily fighter sweeps. I don't think...I don't think that Butch's division ever escorted any bombers in; we may have; I...I've kind of forgotten the specifics of that. But a...a typical operation, and this persisted throughout the war, was that the initial flights of the day would be pre-dawn take offs of fighters to go in and...and do fighter sweeps on targets. And then, in successive operations during the day, take the bombers or the torpedo planes...escort them on whatever their assignments were. Uh, my Second Section Leader, who was an unpleasant guy at best, uh, much cockier than the rest of us...

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...he wound up as one of the leading Navy aces of the war; he shot down nineteen airplanes. And early on he announced that he was going to do that; not nineteen, but he was going to be one of the top aces. He had an uncle...he...he grew up in Chicago...an uncle promised him a hundred dollars for every airplane...every Jap plane he shot down, and a hundred dollars was a lot of money in those days! And he wound up getting, I guess, nineteen hundred bucks from his uncle. But none of us liked him;

he just wasn't...he wasn't...he wasn't like the rest of us. He didn't do the things in the ready room that we did.

Michael Franklin: Was he...was he the same age as everybody?

Mr. Bloomfield: No, there was a great assortment of ages. Here...here I was...my friend, Jack Dunn, was two years older than I was; he'd had a couple of years of college. There were no other nineteen year olds in the squadron. Uh, all of them, with the exception of Jack and I, had gone into the Navy with two years of college and a minimum age of twenty. Butch was twenty-seven; I think this guy was twenty-five or twenty-six...this...sec...this Section Leader of mine. And when Butch was promoted to Air Group Commander, and we got a new Squadron Skipper come aboard which was shortly after this first raid on Wake, that guy who's name was Harry Harrison...was a great guy, and I became his Wing man. Uh, and I never quite figured out whether they put me on...on....his call sign was "Stinky," Stinky Harrison, uh, whether...somebody decided that I was going to take care of Stinky...because he wasn't a very great pilot...

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...or Stinky was going to take care of me because I was such a young kid. We kind of never figured that out, but he and I...had a great time. He was a great guy; he was thirty-one years old which, I mean, he was almost like my father!

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah!

Michael Franklin: Well, that's a, you know, the stereotype of a Navy fighter pilot is somebody who is...twenty to twenty-three years old.

Mr. Bloomfield: Right, exactly. Yes, and by 1945, there were a lot of us out there who were nineteen and twenty. Uh, typically when a...when a squadron was flown ashore after an operation or between operations, a Squadron Commander would be given a jeep so he could get around wherever it happened to be. And my assignment when we got ashore was to drop Stinky off at the officers club wherever it might be, and under no circumstances, was I to return till the officers club closed, "But be sure, Bloom," my call sign was Bloom, "be sure you're sober enough to drive us home 'cause I sure as hell won't be."

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: He was...he was a terrific guy!

Michael Franklin: (Unintelligible)...designated driver.

Mr. Bloomfield: He was alright, yeah. *All of us* drank too much; no question about it. But it was, you know, it...it was what we were supposed to do...we thought.

Michael Franklin: Right.

Mr. Bloomfield: I don't know who...who taught us that, but it...it just went with...the program.

Michael Franklin: Well, how often were you able to be on shore; I mean, how much time would you spend on a carrier?

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, in...in 1943 and '44, early '44, Pearl Harbor was our most forward base. Following the operations on...on Wake, we went down to the Solomons, Coral Sea; we had raids on Rabaul which was a huge stronghold and...after Wake...well, actually we came back to Pearl for maybe a couple of weeks and then we took off and went...way down, as I say, in the Solomons, and...maybe having been at sea for three weeks, we went into the New Hebrides. Espiritu Santo was a...was a major base, and I think it probably was managed by the Australians, and we were there maybe for three or four days. So we're...we're ashore and we fly the planes ashore and we had nothing to do, so we drank; we played, you know, we played games. We played soccer; we played softball, but the O Clubs opened at one o'clock and then it was party time! (chuckles) Uh, but...from there and you...and you said...how long were we at sea. We're on the Independence; we then went and supported the landings on Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands. And the Independence was torpedoed the night of the initial landing day; that was, I think, it was the 20th of November. We took a...we took a serious torpedo hit in the starboard quarter and, at one time, the Independence was dead in the water. But eventually overnight they got power up and that next morning, the twelve of us in VF-6...by this time Bu...Butch had moved to the [USS] Enterprise as Air Group Commander because the bombing squadron and torpedo squadron were on the Enterprise. And as I said, the...the three, twelve-plane fighting groups were on Independence, Cowpens and

Belleau Wood. Uh, but the twelve of us that were headed by...Stinky Harrison, were catapulted off the Independence the next day; she had a...at times, a twenty degree list to starboard. And I don't recall...I've never been able to recall if the Independence class carriers had two catapults; I don't think they did. Essex class carriers had two catapults forward; you know, one on port side and one on starboard side, and maybe Independence class did, but fortunately, there was one on the port side so that as we taxied into position to get hooked up to the catapult, we were like...tilted, at times twenty, twenty-two degrees to starboard, and then they wait for the...

Michael Franklin: So you're tilted towards the sea?

Mr. Bloomfield: No...

Michael Franklin: As you're taking (unintelligible).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...no, sideways I'm talking about.

Michael Franklin: Yeah, okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, and she...and she was underway...and they had to wait...for significant breeze...she... 'cause she could only make something like twelve or fourteen knots. Uh, but we could be...we could be catapulted with that because you took off with...with such a bang in butt. Uh, so the twelve of us were catapulted off. They'd wait until the ship came back up and then they're fire us off...hopefully under almost a level situation. And we flew seven hundred miles south to the Ellis Islands and landed on a little island called Funafuti...Funafuti.

Michael Franklin: Funafuti.

Mr. Bloomfield: And coincidentally, within the last sixty days, I saw an article in the paper...about how Funafuti Island was having trouble with its fresh water supply. I'd never seen it in print...since the day we left there (chuckle).

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: Or since the last time I looked at my log book and saw it in there.

Michael Franklin: Right.

Mr. Bloomfield: Anyway, we were there for two...two days; we had...we had some kind of quarters that were acceptable; had an officer's club which was highly acceptable, and at the end of two days, we got back in the airplanes and we flew back to Tarawa which was essentially secured, but there was still a lot of shooting going on. There were guys still down in some of those concrete bunkers; there were some snipers.

Michael Franklin: But they secured the airstrip...on the island, right?

Mr. Bloomfield: We were among the first aircraft to land on Tarawa after they had...revitalized the airstrip. And they had a...they had a wooden tower...with a guy with a loud hailer (sp?) because they were taking several airplanes in that day, and the twelve of us arrived...uh, and I guess the Skipper went down and made a pass at the tower and got instructions of what we were going to do, and at the point that we were cleared to come in and start landing, we all...we always opened the canopies for landing and takeoff. Modern fighters today...canopies

locked down, but we were always opened. Anyway, we get down to three hundred feet circling the island; pull the canopies back and the first thing is the smell – dead bodies...been floating still...on...and laying on the beaches for two or three days and it was awful; it was...it was a *terrible* experience! And a lot of those guys were Americans. But anyway, we...I...we came...and, I'm not sure we knew what our orders were; maybe Stinky did; we slept under our planes that night...on the runway...we're off, you know, on the side; it rained. We didn't have much in the way of protection. For summer I wound up with a poncho that some...some Marine maybe gave me, I've...kind of forgotten. There was shooting still going on...which was exciting.

Michael Franklin: In the close vicinity to you?

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh yeah, I mean, you could hear it, yeah!

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, that guy I mentioned who early on had been my...Section Leader, uh, and I don't know if his uncle had anything to do with this, but he went down on the beach and...knocked some gold teeth out of some dead Japs and carried those back; he was very proud of that. Uh, and at that time, he may have been a Division Leader; I'm not sure, but obviously I wasn't flying with him anymore and he wasn't a Second Section Leader in Stinky's division. But after having slept there overnight, we took off the next morning and flew out to Essex...that had Air Group Nine aboard. And...and VF-9 apparently had taken some pretty serious losses,

so we went aboard as twelve more Hellcats, and we went from Tarawa to the Marshall Islands; did some fighter sweeps; initial bombing; this was mid-December, early to mid-December and then we went back to Pearl. As I'd...I'd said earlier, Pearl Harbor was still a forward base and we flew back down to Maui, and probably at the end of January we received orders, and for the first time, the entire Air Group Six was going to get together on the same ship. [USS] Intrepid had just arrived from the States; she was CV-11; she's now a museum...docked in New York. I've been aboard her a couple of times; I've taken a couple of my sons on it as a matter of fact. And they just did a huge, major renovation; I haven't been to New York since, but it was like six or eight months they had towed it across to some Jersey shipyard and I know now that it's back in New York and back in operation as a museum. But anyway...

Michael Franklin: In New York City?

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: She's at 77th Street or something like that...on the Hudson River. Uh, she came out with Air Group Eleven, and I'm sure much to their disappointment, they were beached, and Air Group Seven got the Intrepid. And we left...we left the Hawaiians...probably around the 4th or 5th of February. After having done some...some training with Intrepid, they take a new air group aboard; they want to see how things go. And

our destination, after we'd been at sea for maybe four or five days, was announced as Truk in the Caroline Islands and that was the scariest things any of us ever heard. Truk was supposed to be the greatest Jap bastion outside of mainland Japan. And that was a memorable day in...naval aviation also. I don't know how many carriers we had, but I know that there was Essex, Intrepid, Yorktown, maybe Bunker Hill, and at least three Independence class carriers; maybe four, so it was a significant raid. In terms of aircraft...the biggest probably that had ever been undertaken. I mean, more U.S. airplanes than had ever taken on a...a Jap stronghold.

Michael Franklin: And it's all raiding...this...how big was that island?

Mr. Bloomfield: It was...it was an atoll...huge, maybe...fifty, sixty miles from north to south and equivalent conceivably...east to west. You know, coral atolls are little low-lying islands, but in the center were volcanic islands. And in the center were maybe a dozen islands of significant size to be named and then a hundred more; I mean, a lot of tiny islands.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: And our initial assignment was, I think, the island of Moen, M-o-e-n. Uh, (pause) that day I probably saw five or six Jap pilots in parachutes. I think...I think that...that the count that was something like a hundred and thirty Jap planes shot down and we lost...a dozen. There's a picture that appeared in Life magazine originally of a guy in VF-9 who we knew because we'd been on the Essex with VF-9; his name was George Blair

and he was later in my second squadron in '44 and '45, but he was shot down that day and unfortunately couldn't get outside the atoll. He was down inside...along with...a half a dozen other guys. A scout plane from a battleship or a cruiser; you know, they had those on catapults, flew in; picked up George and then went around and picked up another five or six guys. This is...this is a two-seat airplane; George got in the rear seat and the gunner sat on his lap. George was a huge guy...

Michael Franklin: (Chuckles).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...we called him the Bear, and by the time this...this scout plane pilot got through, he had...maybe eight guys sitting on the wings of his airplane. Obviously he's not going to take off and fly out of there.

Michael Franklin: This is what...an...an airplane that has the pontoons?

Mr. Bloomfield: There was...yeah, exactly, yeah. Uh, my recollection is that it has one single pontoon in the center and then a couple coming down from the wings.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: And it sits...and it sits in the catapult on the battleship...

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...on that pontoon and it gets fired up, and then they pick it up with a crane and put it back on the catapult. Anyway, this guy ended up taxiing to a north exit...a navigable exit that they used for ships...he taxied outside and was met by a submarine and transferred all these guys except George to the submarine, and then he flew back to his ship. And

there's a picture...there's two pictures that I have seen – one...did some passing photo flight took obviously with all these guys on the wings, and then another one alongside the cruiser or the battleship when the...when the scout plane's being recovered, and George is still sitting there in the rear seat, and the gunner's out on the wing. Uh, and a notable...the notable event for me that day, this was February 15th of '44, uh, Stinky and I shot down a Jap plane and I never got credit for it. I always thought I shot it down...until we got back to the ship, and Stinky announced that he had shot it down...and he got credit for it; I didn't even get a half, but he was the Skipper.

Michael Franklin: Did it cause a little bit of (unintelligible)?

Mr. Bloomfield: And I...and I loved him; it didn't make a bit of difference.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, it wasn't important. Uh, we had done a pre-dawn take off of the initial sweep, and a second...second flight that day, we escorted either SBDs or TBFs to some targets. And then late in the afternoon...after...oh, I guess we knew from early on...on the ...on the first sweep of the day, the Executive Officer of VF-6, his name was George Bullard, we called him The Bull; that was his call sign, uh, he was an Academy graduate...maybe he graduated probably '38 or '39...he was a Full Lieutenant...Executive Officer...squadron I said, and...and uh, on that initial run it that day, he and his Wing man and the rest of the division wound up attacking a cruiser that was going out through that

north entrance that I talked about, and Butch, uh, Bull was shot down, and he managed to get his airplane over toward...one of these atoll islands on the fringe. I didn't know this at the time, but his Wing man stayed with him for awhile and by the time the Wing man left to come back to the ship because he was getting low on gas, Bullard had put in the sand a great big bull that was readable. So anyway now, maybe four o'clock in the afternoon, the Skipper gets up and says, "Hey, we need two guys to go take some...provisions to Bull." And I, you know, I said, "I...I'll go." And I don't know who the other guy was; I don't have any recollection of that whatsoever...

Michael Franklin: Was he from your squadron?

Mr. Bloomfield: ...with...with, oh yeah. Yeah, I mean, we're sitting in the ready room and Stinky says, "We need two guys to take some supplies to Butch." And I don't have a clue who that guy was; just don't have any memory for that whatsoever. But I wound up with the package that was to be dropped to Bull. And it was essentially...we had seat packs...that we...that were in the airplane permanently, and when we...and when we got into the cockpit, we'd hook on...rear, two...two, big snap hooks to D-rings back here and then leg straps that were in the seat pack, and it was your parachute, but it was also loaded with survival gear; a rubber boat; flares; first aid; C-rations; water, and knife.

Michael Franklin: All of it on the seat?

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, so you...you're sitting on something maybe six inches tall and...and fitting into the seat. And I'm sure they didn't give me one with a parachute in it, but it, you know, it had some essential stuff. So anyway, we didn't have any trouble at all finding Bull because there he was standing on the beach as we showed up and he's got this bull there. Oh, we knew it was him! But there was a wind maybe blowing twenty-five or thirty knots out of the south; this was on the north side of the atoll, and...and I made my first pass up the beach I had...I was probably...I was probably crabbing at a twenty degree angle so that I was making a constant (?) course over the beach compensating from this wind coming from the south; had wheels down; flaps down because you want to fly as slow as possible dropping something like this. And I wasn't satisfied with where I was, so I made a turn and came back around, and...Butch [s/b Bull] is waving and I'm waving back, and I make a...make a much better...I'm...I'm much happier with the pass this time, and I finally threw the thing out...the left-hand side so he can see it coming, but I totally neglected to provide for the fact that that...that pack was going to be affected substantially by this twenty or thirty knot wind that's blowing. And instead of being...in the beach...maybe a hundred yards, I was just coming up where the waves are...are hitting the beach, and this pack wound up...in the water. So, I pull up my wheels and my

flaps; I come around and...Bull is swimming out to get this thing
(laughter).

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: So I said to myself, "Gees, I'm...I'm sorry I got so close; he knew who I
am." And he...(recording stopped momentarily)

Michael Franklin: Did he...did...did he...

Mr. Bloomfield: But anyway, he got it, and we hung around until he got it back...onshore.
And we left him and waved and, you know, you can't talk to him, but...

Michael Franklin: You're there.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...carrying on. And unfortunately he was picked up by the Japs. They
were supposed to send a submarine to get him, and something happened
and it...it didn't happen, and he was in a POW camp for...until
1945...until September...late August of '45, and they mistreated him
something fierce. Uh, in the...in the course of...traveling on my first job
after the war, I was in Washington and Bull was with the Bureau
personnel and I visited with him, and he was still showing tremendous
signs of having had...big, physical impairments. I know he had a...they
dislocated...or broken a shoulder and it...it was never right; he
couldn't...couldn't raise his arm up, and he...he died, I think he died in
the 60s. So he was, you know, he was a young guy, but it had...was
attributed primarily...the abuse that he had taken in the POW camp.
Anyway, having had the experience off Tarawa of being torpedoed on

the Independence, we were...a little chagrined. The first night of the Truk raids, Intrepid was torpedoed.

Michael Franklin: Now both of these torpedoings, did they happen while you were onboard?

Mr. Bloomfield: Aboard, yeah, yeah.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: And now Independence...which was a ten thousand ton hull, it was serious; I mean, we knew we'd been hit. I mean, things ground to a halt, and the air conditioning went off. Uh, but I...and...and we had essentially...the same hit on Intrepid, in the same position. Intrepid's a twenty thousand ton hull; dropped by a Betty bomber; same torpedo, and Intrepid went all the way back to San Francisco under her own power.

Michael Franklin: Very big difference.

Mr. Bloomfield: That...that was the difference, yeah. But we were depriving of the second day's raids. We...we never liked it if...if we didn't get the action that other guys are getting!

Michael Franklin: So when you...when you did a fighter sweep...when you talk about a fighter sweep, what is your primary target? Is your primary target...?

Mr. Bloomfield: Is...prim...first aircraft on the ground, or excuse me, first aircraft in the air let's say. Aircraft on the ground...gun emplacements, and that's essentially it; maybe fuel dumps if...if the location is known.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: Or...ammunition dumps if...and for the most part, we didn't know where those things were. Our...our...reconnaissance was not good because these things were so far away. And even long-range patrol planes had problems navigating the distances that were involved. So, a fighter sweep...was to...lay these guys down; take care of aircraft in the air; on the ground...

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...and prepare for second and third raids with the bombers the torpedo planes. Torpedo planes carried bombs; they were bombers as well. Obviously if you got...shipping, they're going to load up the TBFs with...with torpedoes but, you know, so...so much of the war that I was involved in at least, uh, was...was not against...naval vessels; it was against island emplacements. So the...the tor...the torpedo bombers could carry four or five hundred pound bombs, or two...thousand pounders. But most...most of the use was five hundred pounders. SBDs carried a single five hundred pounder, and I think probably they could carry a thousand pounders, but there wasn't...there wasn't a great deal of use of thousand pound bombs; five hundreds were the...were the primary bombs that these guys used. Later on, in '45, when...dive bombers were eliminated from carrier air groups...we wound up with seventy-two fighter planes aboard. It was essentially two squadrons; one designate VF-fighter; the other VBF-bomber fighter, but they called them fighter bombers...

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...but it was VBF. Uh, so then when we went to sea, in January of '45...on Shangri-La, we had thirty-six F4Us, Corsairs. Uh, Corsair was an airplane so far superior to anything else we'd ever flown; it was...it was an unbelievable airplane. It was faster than the Hellcat; could carry a much bigger load. We had, instead of six, fifty caliber machine guns, we had...four, twenty millimeter cannons. And the fighter bomber squadrons would carry...uh, two, five hundred pound bombs under a wing...along with a...hundred and fifty gallon drop tank; all fighters had drop tanks. Uh, I think...I think there were times...when...those guys would go off without the drop tank with a five hundred pound bomb slung under center and eight, five inch rockets...under each...four under each wing...along with...they had six, fifty calibers. Uh, the fighting squadron had twenty millimeter cannons, and we had...five inch rockets at the time which were a tremendous armament! I mean, we had *huge* fire power! Uh, one of my...one of my most exciting flights...I led a...I'm...I'm way ahead; I'm...I'm in '45. Uh, I guess in May of '45, I led a...a...fighter sweep of eight aircraft to the northern part of Honshu; it was called Miho, M-i-h-o peninsula, and there hadn't been a lot of raids up there for some reason, and we put down...probably twelve or fifteen parked aircraft along with a couple of...fuel tankers; we had the whole place *burning*! And as I pulled out of a second or third run, a...this is the...this is the South China Sea, that side of Japan...uh, I'm pulling out

over the water and here comes a twin-engine bomber...right underneath me, and I took him down. And as he hit the water, I noticed off to the right, uh, maybe a two or three hundred foot ship...steaming away, and I had these eight rockets. And you could fire them in pairs or you could fire them in salvo. So I came around and made a turn and a pass at this guy; nobody was shooting at me, and I just went in to maybe...five hundred from this guy and I fired all eight of those rockets and they impacted right at the waterline; I mean, it was a perfect hit. And this ship...boat, erupted; broke in two, and by the time I turned around and made another (unintelligible)...both pieces were going down! It was a...it was a great day!

Michael Franklin: That's pretty tremendous!

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah.

Michael Franklin: I mean, what kind of a boat was this?

Mr. Bloomfield: I have no idea. It...it kind of looked like it might have been a...a yard oiler, and it obviously had some fuel aboard because it...it burned pretty good. Uh, that was one of the flights for which I was awarded a...Distinguished Flying Cross; it was...it was written up...it appeared in newspapers all over the country and it wound up in the...uh, European edition of the Stars and Stripes. And a guy who had been my sophomore football coach who was flying with the 15th Air Force or whatever it was in Italy...

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...sent it home to his wife who sent it to my mother.

Michael Franklin: What did your mother say?

Mr. Bloomfield: Well, I didn't...we didn't catch up to each other until I got home in October.

Michael Franklin: Yeah, right.

Mr. Bloomfield: But she preserved it. Uh, I had another great flight, as a matter of fact, a volunteer situation again. This is when we were operating off...off of Japan...homeland...almost continuously from mid-May until mid-August when it...when it was all over with. And I don't know what you know about Japan, but it's high violence; Kyushu is the southernmost; Honshu's the main island; Hokkaido is the northern island, and then there's a...there's a little one, and that may be called Shikoku. I...I'm a little hazy on that one.

Michael Franklin: Huh.

Mr. Bloomfield: But there is an inland sea of Japan and there was a slot between this smaller island and...Honshu that was probably twenty miles wide and there were some pilots, U.S. pilots, downed in that area. So the call went out for...volunteers to escort a...a rescue aircraft of...a...a PBM. Some of these were amphibious, not necessarily, but some of them were, but these...these were pretty sizeable aircraft and they were...they were used for rescue missions, and they were used for long-range reconnaissance; they're used for anti-submarine warfare, but there was

a...and then...we called them Dumbos for whatever reason. Dumbo was and elephant...I think what they were.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckles).

Mr. Bloomfield: The rescue missions were called Dumbo missions. So anyway, I immediately said to my Second Section Leader, "We'll do that, right?" He said, "You bet!" At that time, I was the Division Leader in Second Squadron, and I wound up with eight of our aircraft...another division...led by another guy named Joe Robbins, and eight Hellcats from another carrier, so there are sixteen of us are going to go meet, rendezvous somewhere where this PBM...and go into the...literally into the Sea of Japan. It was exciting! There were guns on either side trying to shoot at us. I mean, they were very ineffective because they were that far away. One...one Jap...had the misfortune of flying right in front of me, and I just turned the gun switches on and *boom*, he was...he was done. That's the only aircraft we saw; the only...only kind of opposition we really had. I put the...the eight Hellcat from the...from the other carrier at ten thousand feet just in case something was going on; we came in right on the water; flying four of us on either side of this Dumbo. They went down and...and probably spent thirty or forty minutes taxiing around picking up these guys. I remember when...when we got in there, we saw four or five yellow, rubber rafts; a couple of them had multiple guys in them because they came out of...Helldivers or...or Avengers. But the bad news was...that it was getting dark; we

didn't do any night operations. We had a...we had a night fighter group...of four aircraft aboard Shangri-La, but the rest of us...there were...we were...we...we'd take off...pre-dawn in the morning, but we'd come back in daylight and land aboard. And we'd done night carrier qualifications, I mean, it was part of the deal, and it was scary! It was worse than...than going into that most heavily guarded...Jap installation. Night flying and landing on a carrier...was maybe the worst thing we ever had to do; I don't think there's any question about it.

Michael Franklin: Well, how do you...okay, so...when you have to land at night...you...you're in blackout conditions.

Mr. Bloomfield: Exactly! Uh, for...fortunately, with the assistance of my Second Section Leader, we got back and found Shangri-La. And any identification is a...is a series of...of lighted Morse code...I.D., what, you know, whatever it happened to be with Shangri-La, so we...we knew we had our carrier. And the...and the only thing in addition to that is a...is a red truck light up on the highest appendage that's sticking up from the island. And...it nor...normal approach, in those days...you know, today these guys come in from long astern, a gradual descending thing, and they're landing on that canted deck.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: You know, the ship's this way and the deck is out here, and they're coming in...following what's called a meatball. They don't...they don't have a Landing Signal Officer; a lot of its electronic. But we had

Landing Signal Off...Officers...standing back there on a...on a platform, and his instructions are absolutely mandatory. Uh, so we would fly up on the starboard side of the ship...in day time...normal procedure. Night time, you got to do the same...

(end of tape 1, side B)

Michael Franklin: Alright, so we were talking about...the night landing (unintelligible).

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah. Having...having identified Shangri-La, uh, we come up the starboard side. And what you can see in addition to this red truck light up top...on either side of the deck for a length of maybe two hundred feet from the stern going forward, on either side...is maybe a twenty watt bulb that's...that's housed in a...in a...in a depression in the deck and it's got a lid that comes up and the lid has a reflecting quality on the inside so this light is there to identify either side of the deck, and there may be...may be six of them going up either side. So that was it! And when you get forward of the carrier and start to make your turn to come around, the only thing you see is that red truck light and...and...the silhouette of the ship (pause), and I'm the leader so I'm the first guy aboard, and it probably took the best part of an hour...to get the eight of us aboard because they were being tremendously cautious. Our normal procedure in the day time is that we would follow each other in a span of maybe thirty...thirty to forty seconds from the time I touched down until my Wing man touched down because the...the deck crews worked so efficiently and we could see what we were doing, so that...as I made my

initial turn, my Wing man...normal spacing is behind me and by the time he came around to where he could pick up the Landing Signal Officer. In other words, they had light shining on him, too, and he's wearing florescent gear; they did that all the time anyway, and the paddles were florescent. He got a wave off, so then he's got to, you know, wait his turn and that...that went on so long...I...I was up...I wound up...I didn't go to the ready room and I got out of my plane; I walked back and went to the Landing Signal Officer's platform. Uh, and in that length of time which was probably five minutes, we only had two planes aboard – mine and my Second Section Leader. So we sweated those guys out for quite awhile! Everybody got aboard; nobody got hurt, and those six or eight guys were picked and they wound up...somewhere that night in...maybe a bed or a cot or something...

Michael Franklin: (Chuckles).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...with a warm meal. Uh, I don't...I...you know, I left out a lot of stuff, but we don't have to on...you know, I'm...I'm doing this so that you guys got something to...to put in your...in your Museum, but nobody's going to listen to this for the length of time I've been going on. But I've got one thing I got to report...which is a tremendous kick for me. I talked about my youth and the fact I was...as young as I was. I mentioned that we were torpedoed off...off Truk...that night of the first raid, and the Intrepid went all the way back to San Francisco under its own power. We stopped at Pearl and they did some...sort of temporary

repairs...just to make the...make it easier for the ship to get...we were escorted, of course, and we wound up riding the ship all the way back to San Francisco. (Pause) We then were...were given thirty day leaves, and (pause) the question is put to you, "Where would like your next duty assignment to be?" Uh, and several of us, including my friend, Jack Dunn, and I think we wound up...five of us out of...out of the squad of VF-6...said that we wanted to be assigned to a...a...east coast squadron...forming, and as it turned out, we got orders to go to Norfolk, Virginia and that's where we started...putting together VF-85s. But home on leave, thirty day leave. And you...and you...you leave San Francisco; I...I...we...I guess we took a train, and they must have made room for us. I know we didn't sit around waiting to get...we were in San Francisco maybe a couple of days, and I don't know how long it took to get across the country; it was probably five days, at least. But anyway...got home and my...bride and I...divided our time between my parent's home in Larchmont, New York; they subsequently moved back to Larchmont; her parent's home in East Hampton. And I'd been home for perhaps a week and my mother said, "There's a phone call from...some guy in Third Naval District...wants to talk to you." So I...returned the call. He's a public relations guy; he said...oh, by this time, no, I'm...I'm still and Ensign, uh, he said, "We'd like you to come down to the office if...if, you know, if you can take a half a day off; we...we'd love to talk to you." I thought...alright, so I made an

appointment and I go down to wherever New York Third Naval District Headquarters are. And turns out they'd discovered that...I'm nineteen and I'm back from a six-month combat tour, and I'm the youngest aviator, Naval aviator, to return to the...Third Naval District...from a tour of combat. That's...that's...he's my dog (dog entered room).

Michael Franklin: Hey Spencer.

Mr. Bloomfield: And he doesn't know it, but he's dying, and you wouldn't know it to look at him; he's got Lymphatic Cancer.

Michael Franklin: Uhm. Poor guy.

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh, you got...know something about radiology, huh, didn't you say that? (recording stopped momentarily).

Michael Franklin: And Third...Third Naval District?

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, so they...they discovered that I'm this baby; I'm not going to be twenty for another month and a half or whatever it is. And...this started a round of entertainment for my wife and I...with lunches at the Twenty-one Club; with dinner and dancing at the Starlight Roof of the Waldorf Astoria; the Rainbow Room in Rockefeller Center; the Stork Club; El Morocco; the Copacabana. Every night it was something; I mean, they dated us up...for almost two weeks – lunches, dinners, uh, and in company with four or five other guys who were home on leave. We made two trips to the Grumman plant in Bethpage Long Island; made speeches to the workers, you know, tell them how great a job they're doing.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle).

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, were entertained out there by the President of the Company who was Leroy Grumman, and...and they guy who really ran the company; his name was Jake Swurbel (sp?). I...I don't know why I remember that, but I do.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle).

Mr. Bloomfield: And they...they put on a demo for us of a brand new...Grumman twin-engine fighter called a Tigercat, an M7F; never saw action in the fleet. I don't think it ever saw combat anywhere, you know? It was...it was designed as a carrier fighter, but it was too...it was...it was just too big. Uh, the last time I saw one, I...I attended the Reno Air Races a couple of times because a young buddy of mine owned a P-51 and he...and he flew in that...in that unlimited division several times and insisted I come down to watch...watch. Watching an air race is like watching...a...a motorcycle race or a snowmobile race; it's just (roaring sounds). As a lifelong fan of airplanes, Reno Air Races didn't ever thrill me.

Michael Franklin: Huh.

Mr. Bloomfield: But the last time I was down there, a...a Tigercat flew in that unlimited class; didn't do very well but he was there. So anyway, these guys at Third Naval District had just decided that they were going to make some...we didn't go on a bond drive though we did everything else (chuckle).

Michael Franklin: Right.

Mr. Bloomfield: And it...and it was great fun; there was no question about it.

Michael Franklin: And this was in 1944?

Mr. Bloomfield: '44, yeah, yeah...end of March, early April because I had...until maybe the 15th or 16th of April to report to Norfolk Naval Air Station, and...and that's where we...started...uh, putting together VF-85 and initially assigned Hellcats. But then...by around the first of May, we got orders to report to Atlantic City and there were only eight or ten of us. The Squadron Commander who was a Naval Academy graduate, his name was Warren Fort (sp?); his...his call sign was Fearless (chuckle), and he answered to that and he was a good guy, too; he...he seriously was. And there...and there were, I think, there were eight of us who had been in combat and some, maybe a half a dozen other new guys coming out of training and we reported to...Atlantic City. There was a Naval Air Station outside of Atlantic City; squadron was commissioned on the 15th of May of '44 and within a week, we turned in our F6Fs and we got Corsairs; we got F4Us...which I had mentioned before. It was just a...a fabulous airplane; it really was.

Michael Franklin: I'd heard that those were a little bit more...problematic with landing on a carrier.

Mr. Bloomfield: And...and it's a fact, that early on for some reason, they just didn't handle well aboard carriers and they did some with landing gear obviously with all the old struts because it was, you know, when...when we took them on it was no more (unintelligible)...get aboard than a

helicopter. Uh, and it was just a great...machine; it really was. It was...it was a great airplane; it still is a great airplane. I saw one in September sitting out on a tarmac at a...at an airport fifty miles from where I live in Idaho, and I drove out to look at it, and it was absolutely beautiful. I mean, it looked factory new; had Marine Corps insignia on it (pause)...

Michael Franklin: Is that...the Corsair is probably a...a bit more of an iconic U.S. airplane in the Second World War, I think.

Mr. Bloomfield: I...I think that's a good way to put it as a matter of fact, yeah, yeah.

Michael Franklin: Is there more (unintelligible), I mean the wing...shape, the wing design...

Mr. Bloomfield: The...inboarded (sp?)...inboarded (unintelligible), right, yeah...that...we called it bent wing bird.

Michael Franklin: Ri...okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: (Chuckle).

Michael Franklin: But they definitely have...was more of the...probably one of the more recognized I think...(unintelligible words).

Mr. Bloomfield: No, no question about it; absolutely! Yeah, because it was unique.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: There was no other airplane...that I know of. The German Stuka bomber which had fixed gear...didn't have a retractable landing gear, but it was a very formidable war machine; it has a slightly...inverted gull.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: So anyway, VF-85; we took Shangri-La in shakedown in November of '44; we went to Trinidad and spent thirty days training with the ship; got back just prior to Christmas to...to Norfolk where Shangri-La was based, and half...half the air group got...Christmas...maybe a week off, and the other half got New Year's week off. And by the 10th of January, she went to sea; we flew out and joined her; we went through the Panama Canal; went into San Diego and as a matter of fact, that's where we swapped our...F4U1Ds which had six, fifty caliber machine guns for F4U1Cs that had the four, twenty millimeter cannon. And I want to wind this up, but I got to say...that those twenty millimeter cannon...cost a lot of us the opportunity to become Aces. I was credited with four; I had several instances where because these twenty meter...twenty millimeter cannon...at altitude...froze up; the breaches locked up; this was early on in...March and April of '45 when we...when we got back out to the fleet. Uh, as we were on twenty thousand or twenty-five thousand foot combat air patrol; get a vector...because radar...uh, CIC's got...a raid coming in and you go out and get yourself wind up; turn on the guns; nothing happens.

Michael Franklin: And there's no...there's no auxiliary; there's...

Mr. Bloomfield: Nothing, nothing working; no. Uh, I shot down two twin-engine Jap fighters one day; I had one gun working; one gun on one side. And when you fire one of those...particularly a twenty millimeter cannon and

only one from the side...airplane immediately goes into a
skid...because...because the...the force of that, you know, the...

Michael Franklin: The recoil?

Mr. Bloomfield: ...recoil, right, wants to push that...if it's a...and it was the right as a
matter of fact...push that right wing back so you kind of...you got to...let
some tracers go out there and decide how much you got to...I...I had two
tail-end shots at these guys, and they're flying side by side. I knocked
them...the...the back one down first; I don't think that guy ever knew it.
But in order to get on them, I had to cock the plane so that I could see
the tracers and finally got on them. Uh, they finally said that
these...these twenty millimeters were made by General Motors, and they
finally got a guy aboard ship, and I'm sure that other squadrons...who
had twenty millimeters...we were the first ones out there with twenty
millimeter cannon...uh, other squadrons must have had the same
problem. And they finally came up with some kind of lubricant that
minimized. We had the problem right to the end of the war.

Michael Franklin: Was this only at particular altitudes?

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh yeah. Yeah, I mean, you had to be up where you were in sub-
freezing temperatures over a period of time and it'd happen. But I said
it...it cost a lot of guys the opportunity to become Aces. VF-85 was
credited with shooting down...only forty Jap aircraft. I mean, 1945 we
were fighting each other to get on a Jap plane. Uh, air...uh, VF-45 [s/b
VF-85?) was credited with forty...confirmed kills. My division got

eleven of those forty. I got four; my Second Section Leader got three; my Wing man got three, and Tail-end Charlie got one; we had eleven out of forty. The VBF squadron aboard, which is thirty-six more Corsairs, got ten. So between the two squadrons there were fifty confirmed Jap kills, and my division had eleven of those fifty. Uh, there were a couple of raids scheduled over Kyushu where the Skipper said, "Bloom, you guys got combat air patrol because you got all the airplanes. We're going to Kyushu and see if we can get some!" Uh, the...the...the kamikaze attacks were a great opportunity...for guys to shoot down a lot of airplanes. We just...we just didn't get involved in any of those, and that was all low altitude stuff. You know, we wouldn't have had a gun-freezing problem.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, and I want to wind this up with a...a little short discourse on...the period between August 15th when we were called back, and September 2nd which is the day that MacArthur and assorted dignitaries took the formal surrender of the Japanese. August 15th we were...we were on a...early morning raid; I think I was assigned to some targets in the Tokyo area, and before we got in...uh, we were told to return to base. To guys who had bombs...to jettison those; we always flew back with rockets if they were there. Nobody was concerned about rockets coming off, but they didn't want you coming aboard with bombs. So the VBM squadrons and the torpedo planes were told to jettison. My buddy, Jack

Dun, who had the misfortune of flying with the Air Group Commander, and we had an Air Group Commander who was not one of the superior pilots of naval aviation, and he was...he was over Japan that morning as a coordinator, you know, directing things, and Jack's, of course, flying with him. And when he gets called back, he knows the war is over, so he goes down and he's sightseeing...over Tokyo Bay and flying around and looking around and...some Japs who didn't get word started shooting at him, and my friend, Jack, was the last pilot shot down in the war; he was seriously.

Michael Franklin: (Laughter), oh really?!

Mr. Bloomfield: *The very last* Naval Aviator...to be shot down during the war, yeah, about ten o'clock that morning, and he wound up in a POW camp. They never made an attempt to go pick him up; I don't know why, but unfortunately that...he...he went through a terrible experience in...in only a period of...two weeks.

Michael Franklin: On...he was...he was on Kyushu?

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, no he was on Honshu.

Michael Franklin: Oh okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, he went down in the inland sea but real close to shore, and after whoever was over him...took off; the Japs came out and got him. But...I want to tell you a couple of things, but I...I'll cover Jack first. On September 2nd, we had our last ever flight as a group; we called them group gropes (sp?)...over the [USS] Missouri; we put up a thousand

carrier aircraft that day...flying in this huge mass over...Tokyo Bay. On September 3rd, a...a jeep carrier pulled up alongside of the Shangri-La; the entire air group was transferred in breaches buoys to this little carrier and a new air group that was on the little carrier came aboard. We didn't swap airplanes; they took our airplanes. And before that jeep carrier detached from the Shangri-La, a destroyer pulled up and Jack Dunn...and a couple of other guys who had been shot down much earlier...were transferred, so they came back home with us. I mean, they got...they got Jack out of there pretty good.

Michael Franklin: So he only spent a couple of weeks?

Mr. Bloomfield: At the most, two weeks, yeah. Yeah, it wasn't even...

Michael Franklin: *Very* fortunate!

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, yeah, but he still had some nasty experiences. After...after August 15th and the recall to come back and jettison armament, there was a period of three or four days where nothing happened; we didn't fly. We had combat air patrol...something to do, you know, nothing else going on. And then we were given assignments to go in over Japan in various segments to fly low and fast and as we passed over populated areas...put the propellers in low pitch...just to impress these people obviously with our might. One day Dave Lawhon (sp?), as my Second Second Leader said...we're sitting in the ready room...kind of bored...he says, "You know, Bloom, don't you think it would be fun to go down and land on one of those airstrips and talk to some of those guys?" I said, "Are you

serious?!” This is a crazy guy; hell of a pilot. He’d been my Wing man originally, and then when I got the Division, he was my Second Section Leader. So I started thinking, “Why, geez, that’s a great idea!” So on the next assigned flight that we had to go wherever we were...go...I called the two Wing guys...or Wing men and I said, “Listen, we got a plan; you’re not to follow us; you’re just...if...if...we wind up doing something unusual...you just stay and watch us, but don’t do what we do.” I didn’t tell them what we were going to do ‘cause I didn’t want anybody to know what we were going to do. And Dave had picked the airfield, and we flew in...and he and I went down and landed...

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: ...(unintelligible) circling (unintelligible); we did that twice...in that week and it was *strictly* a violation; I mean, we were subject to court-martial. The instructions...broadly about making a lot of noise and a show...*specifically forbade* anybody to land on Japan, and I think that’s probably what encouraged Dave to suggest that maybe we should do it.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle), this was...this was...after the war had already ended?

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, exactly, yeah, but before September 2nd.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: This was maybe...

Michael Franklin: Before the famous...

Mr. Bloomfield: ...before the last week in August, yeah.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: Now...September 2nd, and we know a couple of days in advance...that...that's the date the Missouri's going to be in Tokyo Bay; we're going to put up every available aircraft...from all of these carriers, and that's the scariest thing that happens other than night flying when they say, "We're going to put us all the aircraft available." People are going to get killed, and they do! We had more operational losses than we did...combat losses, seriously!

Michael Franklin: Just from...

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah.

Michael Franklin: ...air collisions and...

Mr. Bloomfield: Exactly; dumb stuff; flying with your head up your butt! Uh, anyway, Dave says to me the night before, "We're not going up with those guys, are we?" I said, "We have to." "Yeah," he says, "but...we'd have to take off like everybody else, but we don't have to go fly over the Missouri; we can go to Otsuki (sp?)," which is a field that we had talked about that we'd like to go see.

Michael Franklin: (Laughter).

Mr. Bloomfield: So here are these thousand guys up there; we killed six or eight guys that day, seriously! And instead, we take off and we go to Otsuki, and this time we get a lot more serious. I mean, the...the two previous times we had sat down and we pulled off on the side, and we kept the props going; we stayed in the airplanes. The second time a couple of guys came out and we kind of waved and talked and then we took off. *This time*, we

turned our engines off; we got out of the airplanes; we were taken into a...I don't know if it was a bachelor officer's quarters or what; we shared a meal with these guys; we came out to the airplanes; we were handed souvenirs. I came back with a compass out of a...Jap plane and a side arm...like a German Luger; Dave had an assortment of stuff. And we cranked up our planes and we took off. Our Wing men are sitting up there...orbiting the field and we fly back and land aboard and nobody is any the wiser.

Michael Franklin: (Chuckle), did you talk...now after the first couple of times, your Wing men know what (unintelligible).

Mr. Bloomfield: Oh, no, they know what's happening, yeah, and they say, "Hey," you know, "that's fine; we're happy to stay up here."

Michael Franklin: So how did you...how are you able to converse...with everybody on the ground...

Mr. Bloomfield: Hand signs.

Michael Franklin: ...once you landed?

Mr. Bloomfield: Hand signals; you know, Pid...Pidgin Japanese...

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...Pidgin English, yeah.

Michael Franklin: So this became the closest that you had to...face to face encounters?

Mr. Bloomfield: Exactly, yeah...yeah. Uh, so that was how we ended our war. And at some subsequent VF-85 squadron reunion, we told Fearless about it.

Michael Franklin: (Laughter), what did Fearless say?

Mr. Bloomfield: He says, "You don't surprise me!"

Michael Franklin: So fearless is probably a...a good description of... everybody who is a...Navy fighter pilot.

Mr. Bloomfield: With a few exceptions, yeah.

Michael Franklin: Would you say that your...that when you're going into combat..are you more...were you ever frightened...or is it more of an adrenaline rush for a fighter pilot?

Mr. Bloomfield: It's excitement. Uh, I know there were guys who were scared; I wasn't scared. I...I was...I was afraid I might have to make another night landing (chuckles), but...but other...other than the attack on Truk in...in February of '44...that was a frightening thing for everybody...because for some reason, Truk just had this aura of being invincible; there were no other targets that we ever went into that had the same characterization. I don't say that...that I or any of us went in there in fear and trepidation; it was just sort of the unknown, and as it evolved that day, it was just another operation.

Michael Franklin: Uh hum.

Mr. Bloomfield: But we did...there...there were guys who got a little combat fatigue. I remember some instances, I guess it must have been in July...maybe June and July of '45; we'd been at sea for a *long* time. There was...we had one stretch; I think we were at sea for seventy-two days, and that's a long time...not to be on the ground. But there were...there were a couple

of guys who...reported to sick bay to get some surgical procedures that would prohibit their flying for several days.

Michael Franklin: And these guys were...were...fighter pilots?

Mr. Bloomfield: They were fighter pilots, but then, yeah I mean, there were always some guys who slipped through the crack. They shouldn't have been; they probably didn't want to be, but they...they didn't know how to say, "I don't want to be." Uh, but...for the most part, this was one hell of a bunch of guys...I want to tell you...ooh!

Michael Franklin: Now that's the...the type of personality that's...ex...excited to...engage in...what, I guess, amounts to a battle skill.

Mr. Bloomfield: No question about it, yeah. I mean, I...I remember...a couple of nights in our...I shared a room with...with three other guys; all four of us had been in VF-6 together, and as...as we celebrated...actually we...we had a false armistice...maybe on the 11th or 12th of August, and in violation of Naval regulations, most of us had liquor aboard. I mean, it was an absolute "no no," but most of us did. So we're having a little celebration, and I remember sitting there on an upper bunk...telling Willie Callan (sp?), "You know, I hope this isn't so because I'm not through with this yet." And when it was *really* over...I was disappointed. I mean, (chuckles) why did it have to be over; we're supposed to keep doing this!

Michael Franklin: Had you...had you ever been hit?

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh, I had...I had two experiences. On my...on my very first combat flight which was over Wake Island...is October 5th of '43; on the first

flight...which is a fighter sweep...and I guess...I guess I would have to admit that I was apprehensive...*obviously!*

Michael Franklin: Were you going into the unknown?

Mr. Bloomfield: First time, yeah. Uh, and...we probably made four or five passes...at...whatever these installations were on Wake Island, and maybe the third time I started getting hit; stuff was hitting the windshield; stuff was hitting the wings, and eventually it shattered...my left-hand windshield. We had side windshields and then...a front windshield that had a two-inch bullet proof glass...inside...where the gun sight was located. So, we got back to the ship...and I'm talking about having got hit; reporting to the Air Combat Intell...ACI officer, and one of our...one of our squadron enlisted guys...whether he was an ordnance man or...whatever, comes into the ready room and he's got a fifty caliber shell, empty shell, that he dug out of the leading edge of one of my wings. What I had done...probably on each of those runs...I got so close to my Second Section Leader...instead of being out here like this (showing position), I'm here like this and his ejected shells are coming out and hitting (unintelligible words).

Michael Franklin: They were getting embedded into the wing?

Mr. Bloomfield: One of...one of them embedded in the wing, right.

Michael Franklin: So think it was...that's what broke the windshield?

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah, probably. (Chuckle), so...uh, that...that was my first exposure to enemy fire. But another time, in '45, this was scary. We had...we had

been on combat air patrol at...at twenty thousand or twenty-five thousand feet; got vectored out and eventually...they kept leading us down to lower altitude...that...they were getting a bad reading out of the radar. And when we wound up...finally found...and finding these Jap airplanes...maybe six or eight of them coming...we were down...under ten thousand feet, and the first two guys I got on...I had no guns working. Two of my guys shot down a couple of airplanes, and eventually I wind up on the tail of a guy...and we're down to maybe two hundred...three above...two or three hundred feet above the water...and he'd been hit, but I'm quite sure he's still going to...take off. So I'm chasing him, and I don't know what I'm going to do with him 'cause my guns are still not working, but actually...he flew right into the water. He probably himself...was probably hit, and I'm right over him, and as he hits the water, I'm on top of him...maybe fifty feet above him, and all of a sudden my airplanes goes up *significantly*; I'm lifted! Uh, he exploded; he's carrying a couple of bombs, and immediately, as I started to pull...I started to smell smoke and I said, "Holy shit, I'm on fire!" So I start climbing as fast as I can and my Second Section Leader, Dave Lawhon says, "Where you going, Bloom?" I said, "I think I'm burning." I said, "I'm going up; I'm going to have to bail out." He says, "Let me come take a look." And he...joins up with me and slides underneath, and I can't see him now because he's directly under me, and he says, "Look down between your feet." There's a hole down there like

this (showing size of hole)...in the fuselage...*literally* between my feet!
Sit...sitting in a Corsair, you're...you're like this, and the seat's here with armor plate, and I...I could see the ocean, and what I'm smelling is my exhaust...that's coming...coming out from the exhaust stacks...underneath the wing and coming up...into my cockpit. So I didn't have to bail out.

Michael Franklin: So you have a hole, though, about the size of a basketball hoop!

Mr. Bloomfield: Ex..exactly, yes. So that was a...a source of great relief; 'cause the last thing any of us want to do...was bail out. That was a scary thing; that was a...that was a *real* scary thing...maybe next to night landings...

Michael Franklin: Bailing out.

Mr. Bloomfield: ...group gropes...to have to get out of your airplane and...and pull that ripcord...wondering if that...guy packed it right, you know?

Michael Franklin: You didn't pack your own chutes?

Mr. Bloomfield: No.

Michael Franklin: Okay.

Mr. Bloomfield: Uh uh, no, we had parachute (unintelligible) aboard and guys were specific...but that's all they did.

Michael Franklin: That's what they did?

Mr. Bloomfield: I mean, their battle station is obviously somewhere else, but they're...they're assigned...operation was packing parachutes. When I got back to the ship, they dug out...from my...armor plate a piece of shrapnel that was probably that big (showing size of shrapnel), that

weigh...maybe weighted four or five ounces...that had I not had that armor plate under there...would have been in my butt. There were pieces stuck underneath my wings, so...

Michael Franklin: From the explosion of the...

Mr. Bloomfield: Yeah.

Michael Franklin: ...plane?

Mr. Bloomfield: Right, yeah. He could have eaten me!

Michael Franklin: So those were about the...the two...closest to being hit?

Mr. Bloomfield: Exactly, right, yeah. It was...other...other than that, it was kind of routine.

Michael Franklin: Kind of routine? (laughter)

Mr. Bloomfield: It was; it was, and it was great fun. The most exciting period of my life; there's no question about it, and, you know, stuff I'll never forget. And, you know, I never...I never flew again after the 2nd of September until maybe a year later...a great buddy of mine who'd flown in the Army Air Corps and I...rented an airplane at a local airport and it was a terrible, old, piece of junk. We took it up and...and flew over the beach at East Hampton to...scare our friends, but that was it. But in...in 1960, I had rejoined a company that I'd been with a couple of times...or four...rejoined them at their insistence which is a nice way to...have to go back to work for somebody...because the inducements, obviously, are there to make you want to come back, and I went in as president of a major division. And, by maybe 1964 or '65, we had nine aircraft and

fifteen full-time pilots. This was a company that in the '50s had been a Fortune Fifty company, but by the mid-60s we're in the three hundreds because the world was passing us by. We're in the textile business; we're the world's largest...manufacturer of textiles – Burlington Industries; it no longer exists. But...some or other word got back to some of those company pilots that when I was aboard, one of them would come back and say, "Hey, Mr. Bloomfield, would like to come up and sit on the flight deck?" So I started flying company airplanes, you know, with a pilot sitting alongside of me.

Michael Franklin: Yeah.

Mr. Bloomfield: But it was so easy and it just came back and...it got that *urge* going. And when I determined that I was no longer interested in a corporate career at the tender age of forty-seven, the first thing I did was go to Vero Beach, Florida with Flight Safety who were the...biggest trainers of...of corporate and airline pilots. And the reason I knew about it is because our pilots went through there once every six months. I got a commercial license; I was there for nine days; I went to Orlando and bought an airplane. This was in...April of...May of...'42, uh, '72, and we flew that airplane to Idaho; moved to Idaho, and I logged about three thousand civilian hours in twenty years in Idaho. I was a bush pilot; I had...three different aviation businesses, at...at an airport, the outfit that services corporate private airplanes...called an FBO, a fixed base operation; I had three of those. A sensible businessman does not get

involved in...the aviation business but I...did it because I didn't know any better. But I owned..I must have owned five or six different aircraft. I have my last...I got rid of my last airplane in 1994.

Michael Franklin: Do you...

Mr. Bloomfield: And I...and I regretted having to do it, but it didn't make economic sense.

Michael Franklin: Right. So do you still fly now?

Mr. Bloomfield: I will fly this summer with a...a...I...I mentioned this guy who owns a construction company. I had a...a fax from him from my daughter-in-law...three or four weeks ago inquiring about my...said he just heard about my back surgery...but more importantly he wanted me to know that he had just acquired a...a T-28 which is a post-war Navy trainer, probably an Army trainer also, and he hoped that I would be able to spend some time in Boise so that we could burn some av gas together...this summer, so I'll fly this summer, yeah. He and I'll try to scare each other.

Michael Franklin: (Laughter), well...

Mr. Bloomfield: So...we're out of here!

Michael Franklin: We're out of here, alright. Well, I thank you so much for taking the time to do this; this has been a big pleasure!

Mr. Bloomfield: Phew! (Unintelligible), you got patience!

Michael Franklin: Well, thank you so much, Bob, I really appreciate it.

Mr. Bloomfield: Thank you, Mike.

Michael Franklin: Thank you.

Mr. Bloomfield: Good luck to you. Uh....

(end of interview)

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