Eugene D. Camron Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler. I'm doing a telephone interview this morning. It is October the 26th, 2010. I am interviewing Mr. Duncan Cameron at his home in Syracuse, New York. I'm located in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to the site. So let me start out, Duncan, by thanking you for spending your time this morning with us to share your World War II experiences. Let's get started by having you introduce yourself, tell us when and where you were born, a little bit about your parents -- those kinds of things.

EUGENE DUNCAN CAMERON: Very good. My name is really Eugene Duncan Cameron. My father was also Eugene, so they started calling me Duncan at an early age to differentiate between the two of us. I was born in Syracuse, New York on June 16th, 1923. Shortly thereafter, within three or four days, we moved to Inlet, New York, which is in the central section of the Adirondack Mountains in upper New York State. Beautiful country. I lived there until I was nine,

and we moved to Utica. Then my father began working for Shell Oil, and they moved us around several places, including from there to Whitesboro, New York, Yorkville, New York, to Geneseo, New York, to Rochester, New York, to Johnstown, New York, where I graduated from high school in 1940.

EM: Boy, you got around!

DC: Oh, we had a big, big moving day -- my mother hated it, but in order to get my dad higher up in the organization, until he ultimately became a bulk plant manager in Rochester, New York, in 1938. We stayed there until '39, then we moved to Johnstown, where I finished my high school. And then they moved back to Syracuse, and he became the bulk plant manager at Syracuse, New York, where he stayed until he retired.

EM: Okay, now, did you have brothers and sisters, Duncan?

DC: In the meantime -- yes. My brother was 15 months younger than I, the only sibling. And he and I both were out on a ride with my dad the night -- the afternoon of the day that Pearl Harbor was attacked. And we heard the radio announcement by President Roosevelt that there was probably going to be a declaration of war. So my father, who had been a World War I aviator and instructor in aviation, went

down the next day to try to enlist as an instructor in the Air Force. It wasn't the Air Force then; it was Army Air Corps, of course. But they naturally refused him, because I think he was about 49 at the time.

EM: Forty-nine? Yeah --

DC: I think so. I think it was 1941 when they -- Pearl Harbor happened. So he'd been 46 then, so he was older than they wanted. But in the next couple of days, my brother and I both went and enlisted. He went in the Marine Corps; he was so young that he had to have my parents' permission. His name is Everett Malcolm; we call him Malcolm Cameron. And he lives in Boca Raton, Florida now. He's still living. Then he went on to be a radio gunner in the dive-bombers in the South Pacific. In the meantime, why, I had to wait. There was 50 of us that joined up at the same time, we called ourselves the "Syracuse Avengers," and we were under the sponsorship of the 40 and 8, which was the division of the American Legion. And they sponsored us, and we had a big hoopla with parades, and all that kind of stuff. And we went off to New York and got signed up. And then ultimately, in 1942, we finally -- it was September, '42 before we finally were shipped off to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where we spent three months in cadet --

informal cadet training, getting into shape, and all that kind of stuff they do, you know?

EM: Yeah. Now, what did you do between when you first joined, and then when you actually went off to training?

DC: In that one year there, I had one year Syracuse University. Then, of course, I had to go to Chapel Hill. So I was just standing by until they called us in for active duty. Then we went to Hutchinson, Kansas, I did. Some of them went to some other places. Then also (inaudible) Corpus, where I graduated and got my Marine Corps wings, and was changed to the Navy Aviation cadet program to be a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps. Then I went down to Fort Lauderdale to learn how to fly torpedo [hours?]. So I stayed there for three months, then we moved. Then they sent me to Santa Barbara, California, where I was in a torpedo training squadron there for -- and so many of us. There was over a hundred of us in this one squadron, and not enough people, enough planes to allow us to get good flying time. So we transferred -- the formed two new fighter squadrons. Actually, they reformed two new fighter squadrons, VMF-221, which I joined, and another one, I don’t recall the name. I think it was -- I know the black sheep were there for a while, because I met Pappy Boyington

in a bar one night. In Santa Barbara, in the Officer's Club. So I know, he may have been in the other squadrons. He may have been in one of the other squadrons when they reformed. Anyway, the main corps of that squadron were captains that had been in the Guadalcanal era, flying their 4Fs out of -- around Bougainville, in that area. Jim Swett was one of them. You may have heard that name.

EM: Let's see, I'm not sure. Spell that last name.

DC: S-W-E-T-T, Jim Swett. He was a Congressional Medal of Honor winner for shooting down seven Japanese airplanes in 15 minutes. I think perhaps over Guadalcanal, I believe. So he was more or less the spiritual leader of the squadron. The man who ultimately became the CO had never been in combat prior to that, but he, because of seniority, was made (inaudible), Major Ed Roberts was the commanding officer of our squadron. So we trained in Santa Barbara for that whole year, from summer of 1944, obviously, we were there -- yes. We got there about February, '43. No, beg your pardon. I went to Hutchinson in February of '43. I had an appendectomy there. Then graduated from [Corpus?] in September, '43, then ultimately ended up in Santa Barbara in December of '43. And we trained until February of '45, that whole year, learning to fly the various

maneuvers, etc., for combat fighting and dive-bombing, and so forth, at Santa Barbara.

EM: Now, you're no longer in the torpedo bomber?

DC: No. That summer, there was so many people in the torpedo squadron, they decided they'd have to break it up. They reformed these fighter squadrons and took a bunch of us out of the torpedo squadron program, and put us into the fighter squadron program.

EM: Right. So what kind of things are you flying here in all of this training, as a fighter pilot?

DC: Well, in the beginning, of course, when I got to my first experience flying was at Hutchinson, Kansas where we flew the Yellow Peril N2S Stearman.

EM: That's the Stearman Vibrator, isn't it?

DC: No. This was a two-wing, yellow biplane. The Vibrator was called the SNV Vultee Vibrator.

EM: Oh, okay. Yeah.

DC: That was part of the training when we got to Corpus. When we graduated from flying the Stearman in Hutchinson, we then went to Corpus, and we were training in the SNJ, the AT-6, which was a standard training plane at that time for advanced training. Then for instrument flying, we flew in the Vultee, the Vibrator series.

EM: I love that name. I think that's so descriptive.

DC: Yeah, there's a lot of connotations there. Nevertheless, none of liked the Vultee much. It was not a really wonderful plane. The AT-6 was a wonderful plane. And I can tell you all kinds of experiences I had with that. But I don't know if this would be of interest to anyone, but two things that happened to me when I was in Hutchinson. We were training for night flying, of course, and when I got to solo finally, why, I took -- I had time -- because of the appendectomy I had suffered, I was behind my regular class, and they put me back. So I was just using my time to get additional experience. So I was out one day just doing wingovers, and I was cross-winded and didn't realize it. I'd drifted about 50 miles out of the area that I was supposed to be in. I ended up having a (inaudible), which required that I'd have a (inaudible) landing in this farmer's field. So I spent the entire day waiting for help, because they told us never to leave our plane, and I was way out in the middle of nowhere. Finally, a farmer showed up on a tractor, and I gave him the information he needed to have to call the base. That was about 10:00 in the morning, and I hadn't even had much for breakfast yet. So I stayed there all day. Finally, a couple of Stearmans

flew in with a couple of Ansons and first lieutenant JGs in it. They were madder than heck, because they were going to miss their happy hour. (laughter) So they wouldn't let me ride back with them. They fixed the plane; it had gotten a little bit of a speck of dust in the carburetor intake section of the plane; that's what caused the failure. But they fixed it. They brought a crew of four or five guys in a jeep that arrived about the same time they did. It was about an hour from the base driving a jeep, so they made me ride back in the jeep, and of course I was still starving. The guys gave me a couple of little cookies, and that was the end of that day. Then the other incident that I was starting to say --

EM: Who flew the plane back?

DC: Pardon me?

EM: I said, who flew the --

DC: Well, they brought two planes back. They flew two planes out to get me, and these were bi-- these were two seated planes, two passengers in each seat. So one of the guys in one of the planes got out and took my plane and flew it back. And made me ride back in the jeep.

EM: That was punishment, I guess.

DC: Yeah, it was, indeed. And they were made because they missed their happy hour. Well, anyway -- they even told me that. The other incident that was funny was, I was out in night flying. I was soloing my first night flight plane. They said, "You got an hour to fly around." I was so scared about where I was going to get -- that I was going to get lost, that I just took a heading of 90 degrees east and flew half an hour and turned around and flew 90 degrees back, so I wouldn't get lost. (laughter) And I made it. But that same night, one of the guys in our group was killed, because they surmised that he had seen lights on the horizon and thought they were incoming planes coming at them, and he flew under them, and it was a town or something. He just drove himself into the ground. Then we went on from there --

EM: Let me interrupt you for a second --

DC: Oh, interrupt anytime.

EM: This experience of night flying, with no high-tech assistance, I mean, you're just --

DC: Absolutely not.

EM: -- relying on your eyes and a compass and a flashlight, I guess.

DC: Needle ball airspeed, they called it. That’s all you had to go by.

EM: So how was that? Was that hard to adapt to? Did you find that challenging?

DC: You know, in all the years that I flew, I got over 2000 hours altogether, ultimately. I never did like night flying. It was always scary to me. The idea that you might become entranced by the blackness, and you get vertigo. You think you’re one altitude, and you’re actually at another. You have to be more alert than you do in daytime flying. I never did enjoy night flying that much. And I avoided it with a passion, as long as I could. But I did do -- periodically, we had to do some night flying training, and so forth. But I never did do any night flying in combat, which is probably a good thing.

EM: Now when you were doing these night flying exercises, what aircraft were you in?

DC: This, the first night flying experience was in the Stearman. But we did night flying in all of the aircraft that I ever did fly; I had to do some night flying training. I flew Corsairs, of course, ultimately, and that also required night flying. I had an incident there, too, but that’s further down the line in the story.

EM: Okay, we won't jump ahead, then.

DC: Yeah. So anyway, we ended up in Corpus, and went through the curriculum and ended up being graduated in September 3rd, 1944. Forty-three, I'm sorry, '43. Then we went on to Fort Lauderdale, where I was learning to fly torpedo bombers; the TBF, TBM were the designations for those torpedo bombers at that time. They were made by Grumman. And one day, we were doing field carrier landings. I don't know if that's been explained in the previous (inaudible) had, but to land on a carrier, you had to learn, somehow, how to maneuver to do that. They would lay out a carrier deck on an outlying field from the regular base and then we would go out there and we would practice field carrier landings. On one particular morning, I took -- now, TBM is a big plane. It could carry four or five people inside of it in addition to the pilot. It was a single cockpit type of plane.

EM: My gosh, it carries how many people?

DC: You could have -- the interior of the plane was large enough so you could carry five or six people inside.

EM: I guess I didn't --

DC: You had a tail gunner and a turret gunner on a TBM. So I'd take them, four or five pilots in the interior of the

plane, and went out to do my field carrier landings one morning. It was a morning right after we had been into town to see the Sound of Music, the movie. And I was happy as a clam. I enjoyed the movie, and I was coming down the downwind leg. When you make carrier landings, you go circle the area where you're supposed to land, and you start a downwind leg, and you make a crosswind approach, the final approach to the carrier landing deck. I was coming down, and I was just singing, "Oh, what a beautiful morning," and enjoying the heck out of. (laughter) And I turned crosswind. Then you pick up the signal offer. Now again, this is something that people may not have been explained to them before. A landing signal officer was the aviator who was directing you to altitude and speed to get on the deck. And he has certain signals that you were to follow religiously. One of them was through -- he had the two flags on the two paddles at the end of his arms, held in his hands, and he would give you a "roger," which meant that both hands were straight out from his side, that meant you were in good altitude and speed. Then, if you were too slow, he would take his right hand and dip it down -- rather too fast, rather -- he would dip it down to his section, to the middle section by his knees. That meant

you were going too fast, and you should slow down. If you were too slow, he would put his paddles together out in front, then wave them back toward the original altitude. So he would give that two or three times, if you were too slow. That meant speed up. So I'm coming across wind, and he gave me the roger, then he gave me a fast signal. That wasn't right. I was -- as it ultimately turned out, he was wrong. But he was a trainee, too.

So he was learning how to do this field carrier landing practice as a signal officer. And he gave me a fast signal. So I went -- I took some more throttle off the engine to slow it down, because that's what he told me I had to do, and I slid right into the ground. And I went pot over teakettle, and a big pile of dirt and snow -- I mean sand, and everything flying around. I ended up upside down, but I was okay. I was surrounded by sand. The cockpit was open, of course, because that's the way it was supposed to be. So I'm trying to dig out from underneath this, from the sand, and the guys came out. They always had a crash truck at the end of the runway, and they came out in their little crash truck, and they caught me. I had turned off the -- I realized what was going on halfway

through this big tumble thing that I went through. So I turned the ignition off, so I wouldn't -- I figured, well, maybe I won't get on fire if I do that. So I turned the ignition off. Anyway, they got me out. I thought, oh boy, I've had it now. But the other signal officers that were there, they were also the instructors teaching him, said the guy gave me the wrong signal. He should have given me a slow signal. I was already too slow. So he got the blame for it, not me.

EM: Yeah, but you're lucky you didn't get bent for life.

DC: I was lucky I got out of it alive, yes.

EM: That's that I -- yeah.

DC: I was lucky I didn't get a court martial for ruining a thousands of dollar airplane.

EM: Right. Now the other passengers in the aircraft, I take it they were all --

DC: Oh no, we had left them off. I had landed, and they had all gotten out to observe this. Well, the other pilots, those three or four other ones that went in the bottom, and then they were going to take turns. They were going to, after I had done my four or five landings and prove that I was able to handle it okay, well then I was to land. They were to exchange seats with me, one of them, and then they

were going to do it. We were going to make a rotation like that. So no, they were all on the ground watching this. I'm sure that -- I never did remember talking to anyone after, but I imagine they were a little bit scared by all of this.

EM: A little bit thankful they weren't aboard.

DC: It wasn't them, yeah, exactly. Anyway, I managed to get out of that all right, and ultimately went on to Santa Barbara, where we started training in the F4U.

EM: What time is -- what year and month is it at this point?

DC: All right, at this point in time, it was December of 1943. I was at Fort Lauderdale from September of '43 to December of '43.

EM: At this point are you wondering if you were ever actually going to get into the war?

DC: Yeah, we didn't know what was going on. We heard a lot of people -- Marion Carl, which is a famous Marine aviator. And Glenn Smith -- John Smith, rather, were famous Marine aviators who came and spoke to us at one occasion, and got many of us who were considering whether we wanted to be a Navy pilot on coming aboard a carrier or not to say, well, these guys sound like they know what they're doing. This sounds like fun. So many of us had decided then that we

would become Marine pilots. Then -- so when I graduated from Corpus, that's what I had the option to do, and I did it. So yeah, so we were wondering, of course, whether we were every going to fly. Then we got to Santa Barbara and joined the fighter squadron, VMF-221. We called ourselves the "Fighting Falcons." And we had a little falcon, real, live falcon as a sort of an inspiration to hang around with.

EM: Yeah, that's --

DC: There were 31 of us, originally. Nate Post was the original CO. He had been in the combat theater and flew with VMF-221 in its first deployment. Then ultimately, he got replaced by Ed Roberts, who had been a reserve officer who came into the program as a reserve major. And when he joined the squadron as a senior officer, he became the commanding officer. Then we had a Major Ed West was our executive officer, but he did not go overseas with us. I don't know what happened, why he didn't go. But he was much, much older. They may have figured, well, he was too old for combat, I don't know. But Captain Jim Swett was our -- at that point in time, he ultimately became executive officer. He was the one that -- he ended up having about 17 planes shot down. But he got seven of them

in 15 minutes, afternoon of flying over (inaudible). Or maybe it was Guadalcanal, I'm not sure. One of those two. I have to look that up. And the other ones were Luke Schneider, Baldwin, and Don [Balch?]. Those are the four -- Luke Schneider, Don Balch, Baldi, Baldwin and Jim Swett were the four captains who made up the four divisions of flying divisions, that we --

EM: So how many aircraft are we talking about here, then?

DC: We had about 20 aircraft and about 31 pilots. My memory doesn't completely remember, I think there was about 20, 18 to 20 planes, and --

EM: And these are all Corsairs?

DC: They were all F4Us. They started out with F4U-1s, then by the time we got to go to the South Pacific, we were flying F4U-3s, which is a little bit more of an advanced version of the Corsair. So we stayed there throughout the 1944 period. We did a lot of night flying training and so forth, one night flying mission. The kid that was flying with our division, I was assigned by that time to be the wingman on the skipper, Ed Roberts, Major Roberts. There was another Captain Carpenter; he was the First Lieutenant Carpenter, who ultimately was killed in the dog bite. Another guy by the name of Ed Quick. We were in that

division. When we landed, I was the fourth -- I was the one behind Quick. And he got leery after he landed; this was in the dark. And I don't remember, but of course their nose was a big, long nose that stuck way out in front of the cockpit. It was hard to see over it, so we had to taxi in an "S" type of taxi, so you could clear the area in front of you as you taxi down the line. But being dark, I didn't see that Ed had stopped. So I drove up the back end of this Corsair, right up to the end of the pilot seat. There was a big steel frame in back of the pilot, see, and I drove right up to that with my prop. Of course, ruined both planes. And got sort of like a two-week confinement to the base for that little mishap, as did he, because he was not supposed to stop. But I couldn't see him.

EM: Well, it's hard to --

DC: I was supposed to see him, but I didn't see him.

EM: Well, it's hard to fault you for that. I mean, here it is all dark, and all of a sudden, he stops.

DC: Well, they did determination that we were both at fault. One of us should have been watching better, or I was too close, or some other reason. You know, when you're in a car accident and you rear-end somebody, why --

EM: You're usually at fault. That's right. Whether you were or not.

DC: Exactly. So anyway, I ended up being confined for two weeks at the base. Got through that okay.

EM: Well, let me ask you a question here, now. What was your first reaction when you first flew the Corsair? Were you put off by it? Were you amazed at it? I mean, how did you feel?

DC: Yes, indeed. Because nothing I had ever flown before would be comparable to this particular aircraft. It had 2400 horsepower, big, powerful engine. A lot of speed. So the first few times you flew it, you're a little bit cautious about what you did, because you weren't sure exactly what was going to happen every time. It's like anything else on your first try for the first time. Even if you buy a new car, bigger and more powerful than the one you had before, why, you sort of a little bit have a little trepidation, you don't know exactly what's going to expect. So you're a little more cautious. My recollection is vague, but based on what I do recall, why, I know that it was awesome. It was fun, it was awesome, and ultimately I thought that was the best plane I ever flew.

EM: Yeah, I think you were telling me yesterday on the phone when we were talking that early on, the Corsair had a bit of a bad reputation because it was so powerful, and if you kind of overdid it, the darned thing would flip on you.

DC: Yes, there was a couple of instances where people that I knew that had been friends of mine, not in my squadron, fortunately, but in the other units where they had -- what we had, we did the field carrier landings, even in the Corsair just as we did in the torpedo bombers, why, you would land, you'd get the signal that you'd landed, you get the cut sign. But you wouldn't cut it when you were doing field carrier landings. You would just throttle back a little bit. Then you'd gun it again to take off to do another round of practice landing. That point in time is when you had to be cautious, because if you gave it too much of a throttle at that point in time, your throttle was on your left hand, and your joy stick was in you right hand, and that's how you guided the aircraft, of course. But if you threw that throttle too far forward, the tork on the prop would have a tendency to flip the airplane. There was a couple of instances where that happened with people, and of course it ruined the plane and themselves.

EM: Yeah.

DC: So yes, we'd been warned, of course, that this is something you would not want to do. So most of us made it naturally. Ninety-nine point five percent made it, fortunately. But yes, it was something that you had to be aware of, that it was a very powerful engine, and it could get a lot of power generated in a very brief moment.

EM: Now, this thing had a four-blade propeller too, didn't it? I mean, this is a (inaudible).

DC: Yes. Well, ultimately, they had the prop was four blades. It had four 50 caliber machine guns in the beginning, and then ultimately they ended a couple of cannons. You could carry a couple of thousand dollar -- couple of thousand pound bombs -- I bet they were at least a couple of thousand dollars, too.

EM: Yeah, that's right.

DC: They're very heavy, and they carry a pretty heavy load. That's what we did in Korea, was carry heavy loads.

EM: Yeah.

DC: From there, we went to -- one of these things that was interesting about the -- I don't know if this would be of interest to your listeners or not, but we went to San Diego, at the Naval Air Station in San Diego, to practice landing on the carrier. We used that as a base. And we

went out to land on the Langley, I think was the ship that we were using. It's a little converted transport ship that was converted into a carrier for practicing, initially. We went out there one day, and we were on our way back. This was right in the middle of 1944. And there was a big scare that there were submarines off the west coast of California that were going to be shooting cannons or bombs, or something. They had a big blackout all along the coast. And when we arrived back, we were late getting back. It had gotten dark. And we could not -- Swett was leading the division at the point, there was eight of us altogether, came in to land at the air station there, which was not a -- did not have runways per se, it was just a big, huge, round tarmac type of landing space, maybe a mile, mile and a half in diameter. And we couldn't see where to land.

EM: (laughs) That could be a problem.

DC: Yes. So he called the tower, and there was some young (inaudible) in charge of the tower, and never apparently had any experience running the field at that point in time. Whatever it was, he wouldn't let us -- he wouldn't turn on the lights for us. So at constant urging, I finally got permission from some higher up to light one side of one area, so it would appear to be like a runway. So we all

landed, went helter-skelter. One guy drove -- one of my buddies, who was my best man when we got married, taxied right into a big storage area. Another one landed on the wrong side of the lights and crashed into a big bulldozer that was there, using to do some sort of work on that area. He ended up not being able to go with us. He got burned up pretty badly. They were all over the place, it was a big mess. But we all made it safely, we didn't die, except that one guy got hurt pretty bad.

EM: Yeah.

DC: That was funny, then the same time we were down there, we went on a night flying mission, and one of my best friends named Dick [Shasheray?] was -- we were doing night flying, field carrier landing practice at this little field south of San Diego. And he ended up not making it. He must have got vertigo or something, and flew into the ground.

EM: Ouch.

DC: We lost another one there. And we'd lost another one earlier on a dive bombing run, he didn't pull out in time when we were practicing dive bombing. So we'd already lost two guys who had died, and another one who had gotten hurt too badly to continue with us. So we got some replacement pilots. When we finally went overseas, it was

in February of ’45. We had flown our planes to Naval Air Station Alameda, up near San Francisco, Oakland. And they put the planes aboard the Bunker Hill at that point in time by using a crane. We didn’t fly them aboard. We were off to South Pacific. This was in February of ’45. When we got there in time to be part of the strike on Iwo Jima when they were attack --

EM: Yeah, well, let me ask you about the Langley for a moment. Now that was the very first carrier, I think, that we actually had, and kind of proved the carrier concept.

DC: You test my memory on that, but I’m pretty sure it was a converted supply ship.

EM: Yeah, it was either a supply ship or a cruiser or something. I don’t remember what it was.

DC: Yeah, I don’t either. I don’t remember any --

EM: Well what was it like, the first time you landed on a real, live carrier?

DC: That was a fun day, as I recall. We’re all novices, of course, the only thing we’d ever done was fly onto a painted section of a runway, and used it as a target. So yeah, it was fun. But we are all qualified, everybody that went out there. We had to shoot, I think, six landings to be considered carrier-qualified. And but you’d land

aboard, you test your wire, and then they'd release the wire. When you stopped, actually, the wire was such that it will pull you back a little bit. Then they'd give you a signal to start up again, and you'd rev your engine and take off on the other end.

EM: Hmm.

DC: It was just nothing much different than landing on the deck of a field, painted deck on a field. But it was just a little bit different. A lot of people have always thought, oh my God, how could you manage to land on that little thing? Well, it became easier and easier, the more we did it. And I never did have a problem. I really enjoyed a carrier landing. I thought it was kind of fun, and you didn't have to worry about after you landed, you didn't have to worry about runout, or ground looping or anything. It was all straight away. You just landed and took off. No, my recollection is vague, but I'm sure that based on my memories that it was kind of exciting, interesting, different.

EM: Now, what did you think about the Bunker Hill? Now she's an Essex-class, right?

DC: Yes. It was one of the Essex-class carriers. And she was -- that was maybe twice as big as the Langley.

EM: Right.

DC: So it was a lot more comfortable when you landed on the Bunker Hill. Yeah, they had about 3300 people on board, and so it was a big ship with lots of things going on all the time. Most of the time, when we took off from the Bunker Hill, 90 percent of the time we were catapulted off. I don't know if that would happen to be of any interest to you or not, but they'd strap you into this catapult area, there was a bit hook on the end of the thing, and they'd fire off this racket-type explosion thing, which shoots you off so that -- and you'd be in full power at the time. You'd rev your engine up and you'd hold your brakes until such time as they'd give you the signal, then you'd let go of the brakes, and lean way back in the seat, and pull back as hard as you could on the -- or hold the throttle as far forward as possible so you'd have full throttle once you were taking off, and away you'd go.

EM: Now, there were other aircraft, other than you Marine --

DC: Yes. Onboard the Bunker Hill, they had dive bombers and torpedo bombers also, and I think there was two -- we had two Marine Corps fighter squadrons on board. And a torpedo bomber squadron and a diver bomber squadron, and I think

there was a Navy fighter bomber -- fight Navy -- those are Navy. Those are all Navy.

EM: Right.

DC: Then there was a Navy fighter squadron, I believe, at the same time on the Bunker Hill. I'd have to look the history up on that, because I don't recall exactly. There was a lot of place -- they had a, one deck below the flight deck was what they'd call a hangar deck, and that's where they'd store most of the planes.

EM: What were the Navy guys flying as far as fighters were concerned?

DC: They were flying Corsairs too, at that time.

EM: Okay. Okay.

DC: They had finally got the word that Corsairs would be a good fighter plane. Some of the ships had Hellcats on them, F6s by that time. The F4F had been the original fighter plane assigned to the Navy for aircraft operations. But then they -- by this time, or this was 1945, why they had pretty much phased the F4F out and gotten into the F6F. Now this is my memory. I don't know if that's historically correct. But as I recall, that's the way it was. Yes, so we flew what they called "CAP," Combat Air Patrol, over the fleet. That was our major mission, to be on target, available is

there was any kind of enemy aircraft or anything like that would come into our area.

EM: So the Bunker Hill, she was part of a fleet, no doubt. What fleet was it?

DC: That was Admiral [Missioner?] was the commander of that particular division. It was Air Group 84 -- oh boy, here goes my memory.

EM: That's all right.

DC: Whatever that air group was, combat group 84 or whatever, in addition to the three or four aircraft carriers in that, the Enterprise was one, Franklin was one. Bunker Hill, of course, and one other one that escapes me at the moment. Then they'd just do it that way. They had two or three battleships and several -- three or four heavy cruisers, several light cruisers, and a bunch of destroyers all on the outer parameter of this combat group, task group.

EM: Yeah. So when the Bunker Hill left the States, did she go straight out to form up for Iwo Jima?

DC: We went to Hawaii. The second day, I think we ride to Hawaii, and we got an overnight liberty in Hawaii. Then we took off to be available for the landing at Iwo Jima. So we went into Iwo Jima, and it was bad weather. We didn't really do a lot of good for the troops there. We did some

strafing and some live bomb dropping in front of the troops and everything, during the course of the landing. But because the visibility was so low, most of it was low-level, almost like skip bombing, to get in there, strafing. It was not the kind of training that we'd been used to, where we'd come in from a high altitude and dive straight onto a target. We had to sort of glide into it, if you will, because it was overcast so low.

EM: So a good bit of your early combat flying was in support of the ground operations on the island itself?

DC: Yes. That's the first combat operations that we were involved with. Then we went from there, we went to Japan itself, and through support for some Army people that were dropping leaflets and doing some photographic work on a night flying mission over Tokyo.

EM: Did you have any close scrapes in the Iwo Jima campaign? Or most of you guys came through a-okay?

DC: No, they were fairly routine. There was nothing incidental there that we could count as dangerous or anything, because simply, as I say, it was just a two-day operation which we were involved. Then we were sent to Japan area, the whole -- well, a section of the task group was sent there

to just spend a couple of days in that area, harassing the Japanese there with mostly leaflets to --

EM: So, what do we got? B29s dropping leaflets?

DC: Yeah, those kind of things. And the Army was flying these photographic missions, and we were supporting them with our own cover. One of the guys got shot; one of our guys named William [Pemble?] was shot down there. We never saw him again, on that particular night mission. They got -- I wasn't on that mission. Many of the other people in our squadron were there, and they got in a scramble with some Zeros or whatever, came up to interdict them. Pemble didn't come back.

EM: Was it daytime or nighttime?

DC: That was a night mission. And I was fortunate not to have to make at all.

EM: Oh, I guess I didn't realize that the Japanese were adept at or able to night fight with their --

DC: Well, they must have had something, because they -- the people that came back claimed that he was shot down by an enemy aircraft, not by anti-aircraft fire.

EM: Well, they figured it out then, I guess.

DC: Yeah, I guess by that time, they must have some abilities to do that.

EM: Now, you went on some of these, I'll call them "escort missions" then, for the photography aircraft and the leaflet aircraft?

DC: I never did personally, but yes they had a couple of them in which some of the members of our squadron were involved, and I never did personally get to go on anything like that. The next kind of combat mission I had was right after the Okinawa campaign began on April 1st, 1945. We supported that endeavor also. We did a lot of effort there. I flew many missions to support the troops in Okinawa.

EM: Well, at least you had a bigger island as a target.

DC: Yeah, bigger island. The weather was a lot better. It was all daytime flying, and we didn't have to worry about -- not trying to worry about night. There was no weather to be concerned with. We had pretty free rein to -- they assigned targets, of course, and we would strafe and napalm, use napalm at that point in time, and 500 pound bombs.

EM: Did you use napalm at Iwo also?

DC: I think they did, but I don't recall that exactly. I know we did it at Okinawa, because I remembered hitting a particular area where there was, like, a cave, and I managed to get it into the mouth of a cave.

EM: Wow.

DC: Yep. That was particularly a vivid memory on that, because it was rather exciting to see that thing go off.

EM: So that was a home run, as far as you were concerned.

DC: Yeah. I guess you could call it that.

EM: I mean, that's what you were out there to do.

DC: Yes, sir. So yeah, we had several days of support there, across the entire island, including a little island north of Okinawa itself, which is called Iejima, which is an island, by the way, where the famous news reporter got killed.

EM: Oh, yeah, Ernie Pyle.

DC: Ernie Pyle. That's where he was when they got killed. He got shot or something there. Yeah, then right about that time, by this time it was April. All through April, we kept supporting them, and we kept flying CAP over the fleet.

EM: Now, the kamikazes were a much bigger problem at Okinawa than they were at Iwo.

DC: Oh, definitely. They got a lot of the little support ships during the course of that campaign. They did a lot of damage to the -- there was hundreds and hundreds that were supportive of that particular --

EM: Yeah, the picket ships out there on the --

DC: They had picket ships, the fly ships, the troop ships -- all kinds of things that got hit by kamikazes. And Franklin was one of them. I think Franklin got hit, somewhere along the line in there. And that was --

EM: Were you ever asked to intercept the kamikazes when they were coming in, when you were flying CAP?

DC: Yeah, one of -- yes, I was going to tell you that on one mission, I think it was the 3rd of May, we were on a combat air patrol. And we got vectored by the CIC that was the command post for on board the ship, to intercept what looked like seven Zeros, seven bogeys. We call them bogeys. So we got altitude, we got up about 14 to 15 thousand feet. As we got close to where they were, we spotted them, and we made a dive on -- there was four of us. Red Roberts, I was flying wing on him, the CO. And Carpenter, and Quick, and myself. And as we drove on them, Roberts picked out one, was shooting at him, and I, of course, was on his wing. And I looked to my left, and Carpenter was shooting at one. But there was one shooting at him. A Zero was shooting at him. So I slid over behind the Zero and shot him down. And then Carpenter, I don't know, we never saw him again. So we figured -- I figured,

at least, that he got hit by that Zero that was shooting at him when I shot the Zero down. And he never got back. But the historical report claims that he was shot down by enemy fire upon returning to the fleet. So that's possible, too. But we never saw him again, from that point on. The three of us, we all got one of the aircraft -- one of the aircraft was up before they scattered, and then they got us back to altitude and sent us after another bogey that they spotted, from the command post. Command Information Center, I think the CIC was called.

So we went after that. Well, we were at about 10 thousand feet at this time. And I looked down, and I saw this bomber. It was a Betty bomber. It was a two-engine, Japanese bomber. So our instructions were that if you spotted something, why, you were to yell the word, "Tally ho," and then dive at the target. So I tally-hoed and dived at the target. And as I delve at him, why, he disappeared into a cloudbank. So we reformed and went back up to (inaudible). They had us circling above where he must have been, because pretty soon out from underneath this cloudbank he comes, and I spotted him again. So the skipper had me on his wing, because I had one of the best

eyesights of any of the squadron members. He didn't see very well, so he wanted somebody that could see good to fly the extra -- at least, that's what his explanation was. So anyway, I spotted this again. So I dove on him, and we started chasing him. And I was, oh, probably several hundred yards behind him, out of range, when all of a sudden I heard -- seen tracer bullets going by my wings. (laughs) The guy behind me, CB Quick, was quick on the trigger and he was shooting at this airplane through me. We were -- and I knew I was out of range.

So anyway, I finally put what they had was additional speed inducement program called Water Injection, which you hit a certain particular knob and it would shoot water into the carburetor, which would give it additional speed briefly. And I'd use that to catch up with the study, and finally I got close enough where I could shoot it, and I flinged it, and it went down into the ocean in a big spiral. And we watched it crash into the ocean, and we got information to come back. In the meantime, we had had what they had put on, was extra belly tanks to give us more range, more time in the air.

And I had dropped my belly tank, because that would have slowed me down more to catch this plane. So by this time, then, it’s a couple hours, and we’re getting low on gas. So the skipper let me lead the three of us back to the (inaudible), because the guy in the lead uses less fuel trying to maintain his position, you know. So I was leading the flight back. We got to where the task group was, and got into the landing pattern. And circling around the field, I could see my gas gage getting lower and lower. So I called and said, I’m going to have to come aboard, and they said, well, they were under attack, supposedly. And they were out of the wind, and they don’t take planes aboard at that point in time.

So I got in the -- they said, “Okay, get into landing pattern.” I went down to the area which was about 200 feet above the sea, to get in the landing pattern, and I made one turn around the aircraft carrier and got downwind, made my crosswind turn, started to the landing area. And I got a wave off from the landing signal officer, meaning, don’t land. There was a red flag on the end of the deck, which means don’t land. So I went around. Now, this time the thing was hovering on the empty gage section of the fuel

gage. So I went around again, and this time I said, "I'm going to have to come aboard." They said, "No, you're not ready yet. They're still out of the wind." The manning signal officer gave me a wave off, red flag is flying, so I landed anyway. I said, well, better a live lieutenant in the Marine Corps and being court-martialed, than to be a dead one. So I landed. I went down the ready room. And of course, everybody else had to wait until they were back into the wind, and all the other things were set up properly. So when the skipper came down, I told them what happened. Oh, incidentally, while I'm -- so they get me out of the restraining wires and started directing me up the deck, and the engine quit on me. I'd run out of gas.

So I told the little plane captain, you know, check the fuel tank, see how much gas there was. He checked and said there wasn't any left. So I said, "Well, mark down two red balls on the side of the plane," that's what they did in those days, they make a little red Japanese flag ball on the side of the plane.

EM: Meat ball, yeah.

DC: Meat ball, when you shot something down. So I would -- I said, do that. It so happens that this is the first time

that plane had been flown in combat. It had been [ferried?] aboard sometime before. So that was the first time it had been in combat. It ran out of gas on the deck, and we were able to paint two meatballs on it. So anyway, I told the skipper all this when he got back in the ready room. And he went down to the admiral's quarters, where the admiral's, commissioner's flight officer was a former friend of my skipper. They had been schoolmates at one time back at one of the training bases, and told him what happened. He told admiral -- this is what I found out later -- he told Admiral Missioner. And Admiral Missioner went to the captain and explained the whole situation; I never heard another word about it.

EM: (laughs) I bet not.

DC: So that's the second time I made through without any problems, which I was pretty glad for.

EM: So Missioner was aboard the Bunker Hill?

DC: Yes, sir. That was the flagship.

EM: So that was the flagship.

DC: At that point in time. Now, about May 10th, I think it was, the Bunker Hill got hit by kamikazes. We were flying at the time, our division was flying. And they couldn't come aboard, of course, because they closed the deck, and

fires burning all over. They lost several -- three hundred men, I think, altogether, something like that. So we were directed to board the Enterprise. In the meantime, they had transferred Missioner to the Enterprise and made the Enterprise the flagship.

EM: Oh, before this had happened?

DC: No.

EM: Oh, during the event?

DC: Yeah, during the event. As soon as they got hit, why, they realized that that might be a problem. So got him aboard the Enterprise, while we were flying. I don't know how that all happened, of course. I don't whether they flew them over by helicopter or what, but they got him over there. So he was aboard the Enterprise when we came aboard, there's eight of us. So we were -- they wondered, what are we going to do with these guys? You know, here we are with no other clothing except our flight suits.

So they said, well, we'll take them -- the Enterprise is scheduled to go to Tokyo to drop some more leaflets by the -- they had a night flyer squadron aboard the Enterprise. And they were going to drop leaflets over Tokyo from the Enterprise from night, they'd use us as day

CAP, Combat Air Patrol, during the course of the day on their way up, which is about a day's cruise from Okinawa. So that never happened. Somebody had a better idea; they said, well, there's this Marine squadron on Okinawa. We'll fly the guys into Okinawa, and they did that. And we turned our planes over to the people on Okinawa. The Marine squadron there, I don't even know the number of the Marine squadron that was there at that time.

EM: So when you turned your planes over, what happened to you?

DC: We stood by for a couple of days, and they put us aboard a transport, and we flew to Ulithi, which was a staging point for a fleet down in the South Pacific. And we stayed there for a couple of days, and then they flew us out of the DC-3 to Guam. In the meantime, why, we were flying through -- the Bunker Hill was on its way to Guam. It got back underway. So we had to join up with the Bunker Hill there.

EM: Did you get a look at the Bunker Hill right after she was hit, before you were diverted?

DC: Yeah, I did. Couple of big holes in it, one of them when right through where our ready room was. Of course, most of us were flying at the time, so that didn't give us a problem, since we weren't there. We didn't lose any people out of our squadrons, but so people from other squadrons

got injured or killed. But anyway, no, we joined up there, and the ship flew on and sailed back to Bremerton, Washington, where it was refurbished, recommissioned, or whatever they had to do with it. Ultimately it went back in the service. And we flew back; they flew us from Bremerton into San Francisco. Each of us deployed to different units by that time. They had us all going different places. I ended up going to -- and they formed another squadron down there, of course, their squadron.

EM: Did that squadron have a name?

DC: It does. But I can't -- I think it was 121, frankly, because that's part of the thing. But if I had my logbooks, I'd be able to remember.

EM: No, that's fine.

DC: I can't remember. That was December of 1945 when I got mustered out from El Centro. We were there about three months in the hot desert, it was another wonderful experience.

EM: It was, or was not?

DC: Was not. (laughter)

EM: Deserts don't sound good, yeah.

DC: It was very hot in El Centro.

EM: Yeah. Yeah. Man. So how did it feel when you were coming back from combat, and all of a sudden find out your ship has been shot out from underneath you?

DC: Oh yeah, well that was -- in fact, when we finally landed onto Okinawa, there was reporters there, asking us all sorts of questions about how we were -- it got back to my local full standard here in Syracuse that I said, I was "both sorry and sad to see the old girl burning like that." Which is -- I never said that at all.

EM: Well, that doesn't matter.

DC: That's what the reporter chose to put into the paper.

EM: That's the media for you.

DC: Yeah, that's the media. Even back in those days, they had a tendency to be a little flamboyant.

EM: A little bit creative, shall we say?

DC: Exactly. That's the right word.

EM: Now, when you turned your aircraft over on Okinawa, Okinawa was still under --

DC: Yeah, this was about two months after they landed on Okinawa initially. And they'd secured the best part of the island. But there were still lots of pockets of soldiers that they had to remove one way or another. Yeah, they were still fighting. And the airport where we landed is

called Yontan Airport, right near Naha, which is the capital of Okinawa. And Yontan was supporting two or three squadrons with the (inaudible), what they call in those days they were still Army here, airports. But they had a couple of Marine squadrons there. They just however they managed to make that change, why, they assigned our aircraft to that squadron. So they picked up some additional aircraft off of us.

EM: Well, let me ask you a couple of questions about life aboard the Bunker Hill. First thing comes to my mind, we've got Naval pilots, we got air crews, we got Marine pilots, air crews. We've got all the rest of the swabs on the ship that actually run the ship. Do you have much interaction with, first, the Naval guys? Then secondly, the rest of the ship?

DC: Yes. Additionally, I was assigned a large room in the forward section, about four decks down, to a bunk which is the top bunk of four, three or four bunks, so that when I laid in my bunk, there's a space of about two or three feet between my bunk area and the ceiling. But it was good, because I could paste pictures up there of my parents, and so on, and look at them at night. You had a light for reading, and so on. And then you had a head nearby so that

you had a place to go. Then you spent your off hours in the ready room, as a general rule. We would play games up there. We played a lot of trivia games and bridge and chess, and things of that nature. And charades. We had a lot of fun playing charades. So that was where we spent a lot of the time when we were not sleeping or flying. Then there's on about the third deck down, they had the officer's wardroom where you ate, and you'd have regular meals. Always had a big coffee urn standing by, so that you had no problem having your coffee when you wanted it.

EM: How was the food?

DC: The food was excellent. I never recall having any problem with the food. They always said great -- I was never one to be picky or finicky about food, so I was brought up to eat what was put on my plate and enjoy it. I don't recall that I ever felt that the food was anything but good. At that time, I was a big coffee drinker, so we always had coffee ready if we wanted to have a cup of coffee. You could always find a cup of coffee ready for you. And in those days, where they still had people serving you. As officers you were entitled to that kind of service, so you go in and sit down, somebody would bring you a cup of coffee, or you could get it yourself, one of the two. So

it was rather -- it was not an unpleasant experience at that point. Actually, it was not a bad deal on board a carrier. It was clean. We had good quarters. Ultimately, after I'd been aboard a couple of months, why, I made first lieutenant and was promoted to a cabin by myself. That was a big plus. Then we had the crew was very helpful and very efficient. We had an executive officer, whose name escapes me, but we called him, "Be-No."

EM: He must have been of Italian descent.

DC: No. He was a guy who would start out the morning; he was the one that made the announcements on what was going to happen that day. And he would say, "There will be no ice cream served on Friday this week." "There will be no steaks coming aboard today." "There will be no mail carriers coming into the ship today." Everything he started out, "There will be no... There will be no..." So we ended up all of us calling him, "Be-No." (laughter) None of us liked him because he was such a Be-No.

EM: He's a negative --

DC: Nothing he had to say was good.

EM: Yeah. There was never any good news on his watch, huh?

DC: No. None at all. That was one thing I remember as being rather humorous.

EM: Was there any competitiveness or jealousy between the Marine and the Naval aviators?

DC: No, not at all. I don't recall anything kind of -- no competitive spirit in that regard. We know everybody did the best they could, and nobody tried to outdo the other. We just did the job that we had to do. One of the jobs as officers we had to do was to screen the outgoing mail from the list of personnel, or for anybody. We had to read the mail to determine whether there was anything untoward that might be detrimental to the service, before it was sealed and sent. And that was a day where you had to sit in the ward room and read these kids' mails. Some of it was atrocious. But that was just another job that we were assigned to do.

EM: And speaking of mail, did you stay in fairly close contact with your family back home? Or girlfriends, or anyth--

DC: My father wrote a letter to us, both my brother and I, every day, I think he sent some sort of a little message. He's a great writer. He was very creative and very erudite. He had good use of words, and he always sent us interesting letters about what they were doing, about what was going on. Of course, we wouldn't get them every day, because ships, destroyers would bring the mail alongside,

and they transported them on a wire that came across a steel cable that was strung from one ship to the other, and they would shoot them across -- they'd pull them across on a big basket. We were always anxious to see that day come, because then we would all have a chance to see the mail received from home. So we'd all go watch this transaction between the two ships. The big waves would come and the waves would come up and wash across these baskets of mail. "Oh, my God, that's" --

EM: Going to ruin my letter. Yeah.

DC: It did. Sometimes they would get lost. So you never knew what you might have missed. But yeah, that's the way they transported people and also mail and supplies. And they had tankers come alongside periodically to refuel the tanks and board the carrier. They'd have big gas lines strung between the two boats, so that they would refuel the tanks inside the ship.

EM: And what did you think about your leadership, your officers? I mean, the guys who --

DC: We had great leaderships. Swett was very good. Then the other three were Schneider, Baldwin and Balch, were all good division leaders. We had another one come aboard named [DeLancey?], he wasn't quite as efficient. In fact,

he got himself killed by doing something dumb over an island, the Ryukyu, north of Okinawa. We were sent on a mission to strafe some airfields there that had anti-aircraft -- Japanese aircraft on them. The made one pass and that was what they were assigned to do, make one pass and come back. But he claimed he saw some other things that he should go back and get. Well, he took his division back, and he never came back out. They shot him down while he was on that second mission. So he had disobeyed orders by not sticking with the original plan of just one pass over the island. Second pass, they got him. That's another interesting story. We were about, oh, off the coast of Japan on one of these (inaudible) that we were on, on the ship. They spotted a Japanese shipping boat. Fishing boat. So they had a destroyer come alongside and capture the shipping boat, and bring the fisherman aboard. They figured he was watch-- you know, spying on the fleet maneuvers.

EM: Yeah, a lookout. Yeah.

DC: And they brought him aboard. We were, what, me, myself and another officer were walking from our estate rooms, wardrooms, down through to eat. As we were going along the passageway, why, from the other direction comes a couple of

armed Marines in uniform, of course, with this little captain in between them. As they approached us, they had him brace the wall, brace the deck, the side of the passageway. As we approached -- DeLancey was a big, tall guy, about six foot one or two, by comparison with this little Japanese guy, who was about five foot three or four, maybe, at the most. And as we approached them, the little Japanese captain takes a quick little Oriental-type bow from the waist. (laughter) And this captain, who responded immediately by bowing back.

EM: Oh, my gosh.

DC: Yeah. So we all jigged him about that for quite a while. "What are you doing, bowing to this enemy sailor?" You know? But it was a funny little incident.

EM: Mmm. So that was a real -- only time you got any face-to-face exposure to the enemy, huh?

DC: Exactly. Exactly. Everything else was from the air.

EM: It's pretty impersonal, I guess, when you're up there.

DC: Indeed it is. You know, in retrospect, that's probably one of the nicest things about flying, is everything so impersonal. You don't see the enemy when they're dying. You don't see the bullets hitting him, or anything like they do. The poor people on the ground have to experience

that on a daily basis when they're fighting, some of them hand to hand, you know? Just a lot different.

EM: So how do you feel about the Japanese after having been at war with them?

DC: Oh, I had no problem with them. I have always have been the conclusion that it wasn't the Japanese people, per se, it was the hierarchy that got them involved. Ultimately, I went on to Korea and finally to Atsugi to be air officer between the Japanese supply section, I mean, the Naval -- Marine Corps Air supply section, the Naval air section. And so at Atsugi, I was pretty much on my own. I had a jeep and I could go where I wanted to. I interacted with the Japanese people in a very friendly way. Always were very friendly and kind, and were pleasant people to be around. After -- this was after, this was 1952, of course, '53.

EM: Yeah. Yeah. Now, when you shot down the Betty, when you shot down the Zero, what were you using? The machine guns or the --

DC: Yes, .50 caliber. I shot those down with .50 caliber machine guns. We didn't have cannon on those aircraft.

EM: Okay, you did not have the cannon.

DC: I don't recall ever having cannons until I got into the Corsairs that we were flying in Korea.

EM: Okay. Okay. And you always went out with a belly tank, or not?

DC: Not always. But frequently on CAP we did, because you never knew how long you were going to be out. And that gave you an extra hour or so of fuel, of flying time. It depended a little bit on how much speed you were using, how fast you used your fuel up, of course. That helps you sustain yourself for a little bit longer in the air, when you when you (inaudible). Yep. I was on a CAP over the fleet at one time when they were searching for the Yamato, which was a big Japanese battleship. And they knew it was out prowling around somewhere, and they were trying to find it. So they sent out these search missions. In fact, I digress. On one search mission, our skipper and I, and a guy named Chief Haggard, who was a full-blooded Indian person that was in our squadron, ended up a three-man flight flying up to [Yagashima?] Bay, which is part of Honshu. And as we were circling the bay, our instructions were to go up there searching for the Yamato. But on the way, the skipper decided, there's a lighthouse, let's shoot it up. So we made a dive and shot up the lighthouse. We

continued on to Yagashima Bay, and we were circling about ten thousand feet, and I could see these little white spots on the water, just they were moving spots. So I told them, "There's something interesting down there." He says, "Well, let's go down and look." He told me to take him down, because he couldn't see them. So the three of us took a dive down there, and now we're screaming along, but this time from ten thousand feet, you're doing about 450, 500 miles an hour.

So when you get down to sea level, I could see these were sea planes, Jap or HAP type sea planes, they called them. Maybe they were VALs, I forget now which. VALs or HAPs, they were practicing landings alongside of a Naval base there. So we got in behind them, and I shot down one. And I had four or five of them lined up, but my guns jammed. So I couldn't kick them loose. You had a little device on the front end of the cockpit, which you could recharge the -- recharging handles. I had to kick them with your foot. I'm trying to kick them loose, but I never did get them loose. Meantime, why, each of the other two guys that were with me shot down one each. Then the other ones all landed in the water, landed on the beach and scattered.

EM: I bet they scattered.

DC: Yeah.

EM: They got a 450 mile and hour Corsair coming down their gut.

DC: Exactly. So that was the third plane I got. Anyway, then later on I was assigned a CAP over the fleet while they were doing another search. And I circled as high as I could get, it was about ten, twelve thousand feet, maybe fifteen. I'm just sort of hanging on the prop, going around in circles over the fleets. I was to radio signals back to the command post, if I got a radio signal from somebody who would say they'd had a sighting. But then all of a sudden the fleet came under attack by kamikazes, so they forced me to come down. They said, "You've got to come down." So I started my dive down, and I'd had a little bit of a cold and started getting my ears all got garbled up. As a matter of fact, I still have tinnitus today as a result of that particular incident. Anyway, that was another day in the life of a Corsair pilot.

EM: Yeah. (laughs) Well, I guess you probably have a lot of fond memories for that aircraft.

DC: Oh, I do, indeed. It was a wonderful aircraft. I enjoyed every minute I was flying in it. I had some incidents in

Korea that were not quite as pleasant. But that’s another story for another day.

EM: Have you ever flown or gotten around a Corsair since your military life was over?

DC: Yeah. Never flown it since that era, 1945, December, ’45 is the last time I flew it. Subsequently to that the only time I’ve ever been around them is at the static air shows that they’ve had at various places where I’ve lived. And I’ve gone to Syracuse, they had one. And they had one in Houston.

EM: So how does it feel to walk up to one of those war birds after all these years?

DC: Oh, it feels fun. We had a reunion in 19-- let’s see, when was the reunion? Nineteen ninety-four in Santa Barbara. There was about 20 of us that was able to get that together at that point in time. They did have a Corsair that flew in from somewhere, and we were able to have pictures taken next to it. My wife just reminded me of that particular incident.

EM: Yeah, I was going to ask you if you stayed in contact with any of your wartime buddies.

DC: Matter of fact, one of my buddies was named Ralph Glendinning, and he was -- ended up being an

entrepreneur who formed a firm that did all kinds of publish -- they worked for various big companies, like Coca Cola and others like that. He stung us by being the first one to ever make a company of that nature, that did nothing but that kind of work for people. And he made a lot of money, and he took us on a cruise up to Alaska in ’06, and then again this year, he took us on a two-week cruise to the Caribbean, all expenses paid, at his expense. There was about eight of us on the cruise to Alaska, and there were six of us on the cruise to the Caribbean.

EM: Well, that’s a nice gesture.

DC: A couple of us had passed away by that time.

EM: Yeah. Yeah. Hmm.

DC: So yes, I keep in touch with him, and with Dean Caswell, who was a guy I told you about yesterday. He was a Houston native. He was a -- he owned a big New York Life Insurance firm there in Houston. And his son still runs it, as a matter of fact, but he’s very busy. Speaking of leaves going, there they go!

EM: Yeah, is that right? (laughs)

DC: You were asking about leaves, the wind is coming up now.

EM: You just lost a bunch, did you?

DC: Yeah, I did. Just a great, big flurry just came through. So yeah, so I keep in touch with Dean, and with him. And then there's another guy who became a very good architect, did all kinds of designs for buildings all over the world, including several in Africa. A lot of churches here in the States, and so forth. He had his own firm, and he was very successful. I keep in touch with him. He just had a heart bypass surgery, triple, or a quadruple heart bypass.

EM: Now, are all of these guys -- were all of these guys pilots, just like you?

DC: Yes. These were all pilots. I have no connection with any of the enlisted personnel, or any of the others that were involved with me. Fred Briggs and Nick Nicolaides, and Joe [Brocher?], the others that are still alive from our squadron that I still keep in touch with.

EM: Hmm. Well, that's an interesting story you've got. What do you think was probably the lowest point in your experience during World War II, you know, when you were the most fearful, or down or disgusted, or whatever?

DC: Well, when I lost my buddies are the times that I felt the lowest, I guess. Dick [Sasser?], who was the gentleman that (inaudible) flying down south, San Diego. He was a good buddy of mine. And that was a big loss. There was

another one named [Sark?], Tech Sark. He was a funny, funny, funny, funny man who died -- he augured in off of the coast of Santa Barbara on an overhead pass. He didn't pull out in time. He was a good friend. Those are low moments. When we lost -- I lost a friend named Dick Wiseley, who was part of our squadron, original squadron. He got shot down in the Okinawa campaign. And I had to take care of his effects and send them back to his family, you know, that kind of stuff.

EM: That must have been hard.

DC: Those are the kind of low points that I remember. Yep.

EM: And what are the funniest points that come to mind that --

DC: Well, we had one gentleman that was extremely -- was really a stand-up comic, who would help us get through the bad days in the ready room, stand up and do all kinds of jokes, never-ending jokes. That was always fun to listen to him and his story. He had a good command of the various dialects and so on, and he was doing really funny jokes. So we enjoyed that. That was some of the things. We enjoyed our evenings in the ready room, with games we played with the charades, and so on. We were very competitive. We'd divide up sides, and then we'd bet on

who was going to be the winner. Those kind of things were kind of fun.

EM: Have you ever been on an aircraft carrier since the war days were over? You know, they got several of them spotted around the country.

DC: Only once, and that was just an aesthetic display, where they were in the harbor and we were permitted to go aboard and check it out. And that was a long time ago. I don't even remember the name of the carrier, in fact. But I know I have never had any extensive experience on a carrier since then.

EM: Well, what else can we talk about while I've got you live here?

DC: Well, I shouldn't say that, exactly. I became a helicopter pilot after Korea and I spent a lot of time on carriers then. But that was a different kind of experience.

EM: Yeah, oh, so you were a helicopter pilot after the Korean War, huh?

DC: Yes, I've got about a thousand hours in helicopters, too.

EM: My gosh.

DC: Yep. That was between 1952 through '55. I was down at Cherry Point, North Carolina, Camp Lejeune, as a helicopter pilot.

EM: Hmm. Well, you've been a pilot for a long time then, huh?

DC: Yeah, I did. I tried to be active after the war, but I couldn't find a job that was worth the pay enough. I was a multi-engine pilot, so I wasn't qualified to go to the airlines.

EM: Right. Well, you can always be a crop duster or something, I guess.

DC: No, I never felt like doing that kind of stuff. I was trying to get a job as a helicopter pilot off the coast of New Orleans, and I interviewed for a job there, and that was the kind of thing they used to get out of the oil rigs. That was out of Grand Isle. I went down there and interviewed for a job one evening, and I had interviewed for a job as a helicopter pilot in Los Angeles for the mail service there, out of Los Angeles Airport. So the outlying airfields. And they just did not offer enough money at the time. I had a couple of kids by then.

EM: Well, let's go ahead and end it here, Duncan, unless you've got something else that you'd like to go on record with?

DC: No, I think that pretty well covers it. I can't remember of anything else that would be of any interest to anybody, other than the -- that happened during World War II.

EM: Yeah. Yeah. Do you ever think back about World War II much? You know, in your --

DC: Oh, I think about it a lot. I have lots of memorabilia. I keep my room, it's filled with the medals I've won, and my wings and all those kind of things are stuck on the wall, you know.

EM: Yeah? Now, what medals did you win?

DC: I got three Distinguished Flying Crosses and seven air medals. That includes, of course, my experience with Korea, too. But then, and I got the various -- like the Korean battles. Well, there again, I've won the very specific medals, specific ribbon, Korean ribbon, and a bunch of ribbons like that.

EM: Now, were the DFCs for specific actions on your part? Or just --

DC: Yeah, one was for the two airplanes that I got on the one day.

EM: Mm-hmm?

DC: Then you also receive, after you've completed a certain number of missions, you received -- combat missions, you receive one for the number of combat missions. I think it was 25; you got a DFC for successfully flown 25 missions,

too. Something like that, anyway. There’s -- I ended up with three.

EM: Wow.

DC: One was from Korea, and two were from World War II.

EM: Yeah. Okay, well, I’m going to close it now.

DC: Very good, sir.

EM: I want to end it by thanking you for what you did for our country during World War II and the Korean War.

DC: Okay sir, thank you so much for inviting me to join with you on this.

END OF AUDIO FILE