Albert Barton Oral History Interview

FLOYD COX: Today is November 6, 2010, and I'm interviewing Mr. Albert Barton in San Antonio, Texas. I'm being accompanied by Mr. Jim Eckberg, a new volunteer to the oral history program. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies Archives in the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of the historical information related to this society. Now, Albert, I'd like to start out and just asking you a little bit about your background, where you were born, when you were born, a little bit about your family, what your mother and dad did, and brothers and sisters, and we'll just take it from there.

ALBERT BARTON: Okay, Albert Barton, of Lovett, Texas. June 28, 1925, and I've got one brother. My dad was a pipe-fitter in construction work, and we moved all over Texas and Louisiana during my growing up day. I went to about seven different schools when I was growing up, and so I really don't have a home. I spent a lot of time in Victoria, Texas, but I really don't have a home because we moved around because he was in construction work. And I've got one brother. He was in the Army during the World War II.

And I tried to talk him in the Navy, but he wound up (laughs) in the Army. And --

FC: What was his name?

AB: He was Edgar Everett Barton. And my dad, he's the junior. My dad was Edgar Everett Barton, and my mother was Alberta Barton, so we kind of kept the names in the family.

FC: Now, did you graduate from school in Victoria, or?

AB: [0:02:00] No, I graduated in Port Arthur, Texas. (coughs) Mom and dad went to Tennessee to work on the atomic plant there. And so, my brother is in radio school, electronics school in Port Arthur, so I went there and enrolled out, and finished my senior year in Port Arthur. And I went, after summer was over, I went back to Port Arthur, and went into electronic school, and spent about three or four months there, and I wasn't too interested in it, making C's, D's, repeating courses and everything. And I finally told dad, "I want to join the Navy," so I went into the Navy.

FC: What year was that, and date?

AB: It's in April. April '40, what, '45, '44, '45. That was 60-some-odd years ago.

FC: I understand. So, you enlisted whereat?

AB: Houston.

FC: Houston?

AB: Yeah. And said I'm leaning very much towards people going in the service because it matures you, and you grow up fast in there. I said when I was going to electronic school, I was making Cs, and Ds, and repeating courses, and when I got out of the Navy, I went back to an electronic school, and I finished a 18-month course in 12 months, got all of my FCC licenses, and went to work. Because I was a little more mature and I knew what I wanted to do.

FC: After you enlisted, where did you take your boot?

AB: I took it in San Diego. At that time, all day we were losing all the battles in the Pacific, the [Talon?] Corridor, all around then. So, they had me scheduled for radio school, but they needed people in the field, so they put us into a squadron. In your squadron, while they had mechanics and flight personnel, and you went into about, oh, for proper training, and then you went aboard ship, and they split it up. The mechanics went into the ships company, and the flight personnel went into the squadron.

FC: Now, did you have any flight training before you went onboard?

AB: No. When I went onboard, I didn't go to any school in the Navy. I came up through the striker route.

FC: Now, explain that, what a striker is.

AB: Well, a striker, in the Navy, to upgrade your rate, well, you take a test, both in my case, an electronics test and a seamen's test, and if you pass the test, then you went up in rank, but you don't go to school.

FC: So, it's basically OJT, on the job training?

AB: That's right.

FC: You'd be at your rank.

AB: I got my gun rouser, radio and gunner, and I got my gunnery training on our first hop on there by the regular gunner. I was flying in torpedo bombers, TBFs, and of course we had a turret gunner, and then radio them with a stinger, .30-caliber stinger gun in the back. And he came out of the turret and showed me how to load the gun, and how to point it and fire it. And that was my gunnery training. So, (laughter) we were in strife to Okinawa.

FC: Okay, let's go back a little bit. Once you were assigned a ship, what ship was it?

AB: Well, I dug this out of the --

FC: Is this flight book?

AB: Flight book, yeah.

FC: He's got one of those.

JIM ECKBERG: Yeah.

AB: Now, we spent about the first year and a half as anti-sub work in the North Atlantic before we went down to the Pacific.

JE: In the North Atlantic?

AB: Yeah, north, ain't it cold and lousy? My first ship was in Mission Bay, and then I was on the USS *Tripoli*.

FC: Okay, on the Mission Bay, how long did you serve on that?

AB: We usually went out about two, two and a half months on an anti-sub control, and then came back in, and stayed probably maybe 30 days, then went out again.

FC: What was your home base at the time?

AB: Norfolk.

FC: That's where my grandson's at.

AB: Yeah. I'm trying to say Norfolk without sneering at you. (laughter) They were the ones that have the signs in the downtown park, "Dogs and sailors keep off the grass."

FC: Yeah?

AB: Yeah.

FC: Hasn't changed too much. (laughter)

AB: And the --

FC: Well now, tell me a little bit about being in the North Atlantic. You were on sub patrol?

AB: Yeah.

FC: Did you ever spot any subs?

AB: Not on my crew. The commander, Lieutenant Williams, he, over the course of our -- got two submarines, two German submarines. Our crew didn't get any.

FC: Well now, you're on a TBF or a TBM?

AB: We were on both. TBFs first, and then we got to the South Pacific on TBMs.

FC: Okay, now those are torpedo bombers, right?

AB: Right, uh-huh.

FC: Can you --

AB: TBF was made by [Roman?]. TBM was General Motors.

FC: Now, how did they sink submarines with a torpedo bomber?

AB: Ah, we had depth charges and [soda?] bombs, and then circle with depth charges. And what they tried to do was go down to across a submarine and drop one on each side, and when that's where they would all fly, across the side of the submarine.

FC: Now, how did you, as an enlisted man, how did you get along with your pilot?

AB: I didn't have a real good relationship. I mean, we weren't buddy-buddies.

FC: No, I understand.

AB: But (laughs) I don't remember any problems with it.

FC: You mean just okay, then?

AB: Yeah, and when we were in the North Atlantic, I know my mother wrote a letter saying how horrible it was that the Germans were sending young children, young kids into war. When we was out there, I was 18, my gunner was 19, and the pilot was 23 years old, so, war is for young people. Old men have no business being in a war.

JE: What were the dates that you were there in the -- what was your length or your cruise?

AB: I don't -- oh, 10/28/43 to 12/4/43, on Mission Bay.

FC: So, October to December '43 is going to be chilly in the North Atlantic. (laughs)

AB: Well, very. The weather was our biggest problem that we had because the fall can close in on you in just minutes. I know that, let's see, Willy was on the *Tripoli*, was the next ship by. It was a little German sub out there. There was a weather sub. It would pop up and transmit weather back to Germany, and then pop down. And we were trying to get it, but every time we'd get out there, why, of course he was down again. And we caught him one time, and they sent four TBMs and five fighters out there. And of course, the sub was socked in, was followed by the time we got there. And when they got back to the ship, we were bogged in too, and they couldn't land on the ship, so they sent the DEs out in different directions. And the first one

that found a clear spot radioed back, and all nine planes went out there after that set and made water landings. And we lost nine planes and one crew, and we didn't lose a man. The DE picked him up.

JE: And what was the DE?

AB: That I don't remember, (laughs) but we always had four DEs with the carrier force. It was one carrier and four DEs on the anti-sub coast.

FC: So, you were on two different ships when you were in the Atlantic, huh?

AB: I was on Mission Bay, *Tripoli*, the corps, and back on Mission Bay. Now, the Long Island was the one that transported us to South Pacific, but I was on four ships in the Atlantic.

FC: Now, did you have the same crew? Would you have the same other gunner and pilot?

AB: Yeah, I flew his tail.

JE: So that was an integral crew?

AB: Yeah.

JE: You wouldn't change members?

AB: Yeah, they just put they squadron into different ships.

JE: Right, right.

AB: Yeah.

JE: And when you were out on your sub patrol, and if you were going to be doing a depth charge bombing of them, what altitude would you be above the deck, above the surface of the water?

AB: We usually cruise about 2,000 feet, 2,500, while we were searching. If you saw an enemy, you'd dive down, and you'd probably reach around about maybe 500 feet.

JE: Really, so 500?

AB: Mm-I.

JE: And that's obviously going to be back --

AB: Yeah.

JE: -- because the bombs, and the torpedoes, or whatever it is you're dropping, are going to fly forward at the same rate the aircraft is going.

AB: Right.

JE: At the separation.

AB: Yeah. They tried to straddle the sub with the bombs.

FC: Did you gunners also strike them at the same time?

AB: Oh yeah, yeah.

FC: Now, I've wondered, in your position, did you have to lay on your stomach back there in that --

AB: Well, while I was doing the searching, I was operating the radar during then, and even you have a seat. But when you

were actually strafing more, then you was right on your belly.

FC: That’s what I thought.

AB: Yeah, because the [scare?] gun was right out the back below the tail.

JE: How many rounds of ammunition would you carry for that sort of thing?

AB: I think there was around 500 in there.

JE: And on those goes, they have the 50s in the nose? Is that right?

AB: Yeah. They had --

JE: Forward facing?

AB: We had four .50-calibers in the wings, and they also carried four, two on each side, two --

JE: Thirties?

AB: No. What the heck did he call them? Well I guess I am getting old. (laughs)

JE: Four, were they --

FC: Were they guns or rockets?

AB: No, they were rockets. Four. They had four rockets on each side too, so that they could also hit the submarine or any other ship with rockets in the bombs.

JE: Basically, they were unguided missiles.

AB: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. We didn't get into the guided missiles until after World War II.

JE: Right, right.

FC: They were just fire for effect.

AB: Yeah, they aimed them just like they did guns.

FC: Right.

AB: Yeah.

FC: So, when you were assigned to your first aircraft carrier, were you flown into that carrier, or did you board it on the land?

AB: No, we boarded on the land.

FC: Okay, so the first time you ever took off from an air craft carrier was when you were assigned to it?

AB: Yeah.

FC: Wow what a training program!

AB: Yeah. (laughter)

FC: An SOJT. (laughter)

AB: Yeah. I actually went aboard to Mission Bay as a seaman first, and then the Navy came out with a directive that all combat air crewmen had to be third grade petty officers or up. So then I had to take a test real quick and make my petty officer third.

FC: And thinking back, Albert, I know it’s been a long time, can you remember exactly how it felt when you got in that plane and were taken off that deck the first time?

AB: Oh, you have to remember now, I was 17 years old when I went in. Our family wasn’t real close, and I had no girlfriends, or wives, or anything back home, so it was just a big adventure for me. And that’s what I decided I wanted to do, is be in the Air Force. It was great for me. According to my log book here, I made 100 carrier landings in naval career, through my whole life, all the ships I was on.

FC: That’s not bad.

AB: Yeah.

FC: I mean, consider what you’re landing on, (laughter) that thing bobbing around out there.

AB: Yeah. Yeah.

FC: So, after you served in the Atlantic, and if I understand you correctly, you really did not get into any actual combat.

AB: No.

FC: And then they decided they were going to switch you to the Pacific. Tell me how that came about. Did you go by ship, and go through the canal, or?

AB: Yeah. We went on the Long Island. That was a little converted -- they loaded the planes on there, and we went through the Panama Canal. And we spent I think 30 days at the Hilo, La Jolla training. And then we went out there and got in on the invasion of Okinawa.

FC: Now, what year was this that you went through the canal and headed for the Pacific?

AB: Probably ’45. It looks like it was February of ’45.

FC: So, now you’re on the Long Island in the Pacific.

AB: We went to Hilo, La Jolla, and spent 30 days training there. And then they shipped us out to Leyte, and we picked up our Anzio, USS Anzio, at nighttime. And what?

FC: The training that you took, was this to continue on with the TBM or TBFs, or was that different training?

AB: No, it was the same training. We did a lot of skip bombing training, and you know what skip bombing is? Okay.

FC: Describe it to us if you would.

AB: Okay. Well, you have usually 100-pound bombs, and you come into them about 500 feet and drop the bombs. And the bombs don’t have time to straighten up and hit dead on. They’ll hit on the side and skip [00:18:00] into the target.

FC: So, like when you’re a kid, you throw rocks, they skip.

AB: Yeah, yeah.

JE: What sort targets were you attempting to go at?

AB: They were dug-in targets, where they had maybe walled up, or they were in a building.

JE: On the shoreline?

AB: Yeah, on the shoreline, yeah.

JE: So, you would skip it off the water approaching the coastline?

AB: No, we would actually skip it off the ground in there, and skip it into a building that they, the Japs, were holed up in.

FC: Now, what ship is this you're on now, when you're in the Pacific?

AB: Anzio. A-N-Z-I-O.

FC: You're the first one that I've interviewed that was on the Anzio. I wasn't familiar with that.

AB: Yeah, well, these are all what they call jeep carriers and small carriers.

FC: Now, what was your pilot's name? Do you [0 0:19:00] remember?

AB: [Hudik?].

FC: Was he a JG?

AB: JG Hudik.

FC: And how about your other gunner?

AB: [Raycamp?]. He was second class. I think he was a mechanic. He was a second-class mechanic.

FC: And as well as a gunner?

AB: Yeah. Yeah, so.

FC: Did you guys, of course you didn't get much shore leave, I don't imagine, when you're in the Pacific, but did you hang out together with your other enlisted men?

AB: Yeah, like that. I had another radio enlist I that ran around quite green. We ran around together quite a bit.

FC: Is he still alive? And do you still --

AB: I have no idea. I've never contacted anybody since I got out of the service. And since we didn't have much maturity, we went into [Lady Luck?] to restock our ammo, and we got shore leave. Let me describe the shore leave.

FC: Yes, please.

AB: The pilots, or for the officers, a power boat came alongside. They load them up. They took them to an island, I don't remember what island it was, and they had an air-conditioned building there with a wet bar, pool tables, ping pong tables, jukebox, lounge chairs, and everything. The enlisted men went on leave, we loaded into a landing craft, and rode about 15 minutes, and got onto an LCI. And then we rode about 30 minutes, and got onto another landing craft, and that landed us on the island of Mogmog, and we marched down a row of barbed war into a little barbed wire cubicle. And then in that cubicle, you

got your choice of two beers or one Coke, and you sat on the damp sand there for four hours, (laughs) and then you went back down the barbed wire corridor back on the landing craft LCI, landing craft, back to the ship. And in the six or eight months, whatever it was I was on the ship, I went off one time. (laughs) I didn't think it was worth the trouble. And there was guys that had been on the ship out there. The ship's company, they'd been out there for 18 months. They've never been off that ship.

JE: Wow!

FC: Oh my goodness, talk about sea legs.

AB: That's one of the reasons why I didn't reenlist in the Navy. (laughter)

JE: I was going to say, at least you didn't have to swim to shore to get there. They gave you a landing craft to go on. (laughs)

FC: Is that what they call, "rank has its privilege"?

AB: Yeah, that's right. (laughter)

FC: Well, your wife mentioned to me that you had one adventure coming off an aircraft carrier. Where did this take place? And tell us about this adventure.

AB: Well, on the Anzio, and we were coming back from [Latig?], and they decided that they ought to have some gunnery practice. So, we were chosen to pull a tow target. And we

pulled the tow cart for practice, and after we released the tow target, we came back into the carrier for a landing. And I don't understand exactly how the cables work, but we hit deck fine, and picked up number two cable, but it jumped over the number three cable, and picked up the number four. And that took all of the hydraulic pressure off the cable. So, it was just like we missed the cable altogether. And everything would've been all right. We'd gone into the barrack in front. But about that time, the ship rolled and slid us over to the side. And we went through and completely destroyed a 20-millimeter gun mount, and went on and hit a 40-millimeter gun mount. They were twin guns. We took one of those out, and then hanging off the side of the ship, while the tail hook finally released from the cable and we flipped in on our back. Now, of course, the pilot and the gunner sitting up there in a turret and cockpit, they knew we was hit on the back, but I was down in the (inaudible) I never realized that we were upside down, and we were very well trained. In our training, we had to sit there in the building with a blindfold and reach all of our emergency equipment. Well, the problem is being upside down, where you reach up here for your emergency equipment is now down there. And since I didn't realize that we were upside down, I couldn't find

any of it. And the water was rushing in, in your face, and all I could see was just a brown blob. I couldn't see anything in there. It was like somebody has taken a hose in your face and blinding you. But with that water coming down, it felt like there was a hole up there someplace. So, I pulled myself upstream there, and up in the center cockpit when it hit upside down, it broke the Plexiglas in the center cockpit. And I found a holder, and I broke enough of the Plexiglas out for me to fit through, so I went through there and swam out. And by the time I got out, the gunner and the pilot already had the life raft out, and they were in the life raft. But the pilot evidently took a lot of salt water when he went under, and he was sitting there throwing up (laughs) on the side of the raft. So, he said if I was all right, well, just to not climb on, just hang on the side, because the ship, any time you're landing craft you're got a DE in the back of the carrier, and their job is if anything happens, to go over and pick up the -- so, the DE came over. He was just standing there to pick us up. And he was only about, looked like about 15 yards over. So, I said, "the heck with it. I'll swim over." But what you realize, and I was swimming in full flight gear, and it was the longest 50 years I've ever swam in my life, (laughter), and I was

completely pooped when they put a rope net over the side, and you climbed up in the net, and everybody got out, and nobody got hurt. But I was one pooped kid when I got out. (laughter)

FC: I would imagine.

AB: Yeah.

FC: I bet the adrenaline was really pumping about that time.

AB: Yeah, it was. (laughter) We stayed overnight on the DE, and they transferred us back to carrier the next morning, and we went back to flying.

FC: And you got another plane?

AB: Yeah.

FC: Speaking of planes, did you ever have names on your planes that you guys flew?

AB: Some of the fighters did. We didn't have any on ours because the pilots and the flyer crew stayed in their own plane, but the RTV, we took whatever plane was on the catapult.

JE: Really?

AB: Yeah. We didn't fly the same plane every time.

JE: Do you recall any of the tail numbers that you flew? Tail numbers of the aircraft?

AB: No, I sure don't. I know one according to -- I was reading this thing because I haven't looked at this 60 years. And

I was reading all of this, and I've got a note in here that we bombed one freighter in the Okinawa Harbor there and left it burning. It was the time we hit it with a 500-pound bomb. Let's see. I hadn't looked at this thing in 50 or 60 years, but I had the little deal with the water landing in there. I'll tell you one thing. My handwriting wasn't that good back then. (laughter)

FC: Now, when you had this incident with your plane, was that before Okinawa or after?

AB: That was during Okinawa.

FC: Oh, during Okinawa --

AB: Yeah.

FC: invasion.

AB: Yeah.

FC: Tell us a little bit about what you saw, and just different aspects of the Okinawan invasion, about seeing ships and these things.

AB: We were there when the Marines first went in, made their first landing, and flying about 3,000 feet. You look from horizon to horizon, and there was nothing but ships. They were both battleships and supply ships, and it was just I've never seen that much flotilla in my life. But it always had it covered with (inaudible) ships. And we saw the first Marines go in there. And you would've thought

with that much surrounding you, that you have sort of gave up. But what that was on there, very tough, tough pilots. During the war, they fought to just the last. We took about (inaudible) Japs and the (inaudible) as well, we had about 15 strikes on there. I think I got three air mails out of it.

FC: Now, flying in Okinawa, you were flying ground support basically.

AB: Yeah, literally, yeah.

FC: And as you said, you were skip bombing, and striking.

AB: Yeah.

FC: And whatever they needed done.

JE: What sort of targets were you going after on the island?

AB: It just looked like grass, hooves, and stuff from us. They told us which targets to shoot, and well, that's where we dropped the bomb.

JE: Like command center?

AB: Yeah.

JE: Radio center?

AB: Yeah.

JE: That sort of thing?

AB: Stuff like that. But from the plane, you really couldn't tell a whole lot about what you were hitting.

JE: And you flew 15 combat missions in support of it?

AB: Yeah. Some of them were on Jap home islands, and most were on Okinawa.

JE: What were some of the other islands? What were their names? Do you recall?

AB: (laughs) Oh, do you all have this much trouble with 65-year-old, 85-year-old people? (laughter)

FC: So you, as well as Okinawa, you flew against, as you said the home islands.

AB: Yeah. We did. We did a lot of the -- well, the third fleet was against the home islands there, while we did a lot of the anti-sub work around the search. We were free because by that time, Japan's Air Force was down to kamikazes and submarines. So, we did a lot of anti-sub work around the third fleet there to keep them in one peace. And they --

FC: Did you observe any of the kamikazes off Okinawa?

AB: Our pilots. Of course, we were in TBMs, so they didn't send us up against there, but they sent our pilots, but I think our pilots got, I don't know, maybe 15 or so, but they never hit our ship. The *Ticonderoga* was out there, got hit pretty bad.

FC: Yes, it did there.

AB: And the kamikazes did a lot of damage out there. I don't think the newspapers never seemed to ever report it,

exactly how bad they were, but they were a force that you had to contend with.

FC: I've interviewed quite a number of former sailors, and they said that's the most scary thing that they had all during their combat tours.

AB: Yeah.

FC: Because you never knew when they were going to get you.

AB: Yeah. Well, luckily, they went after the bigger ships, and we were on the jeep carries, so they didn't bother us too much. They'd rather hit a big ship. And the pilots had no problem with them because they took most of the armor out of those planes, so that they could load it up with more bombs. So, they were not hard at all to shoot down, yeah, if you got there in time, so.

JE: And did you change from a different aircraft carrier when you were out there at the jeep carrier? Were you on a different one, or did you stay on?

AB: I was on the Anzio the whole time.

JE: You stayed on the Anzio the entire time.

AB: Right.

JE: The entire time.

AB: Yeah. Thank you.

FC: I thought you might need it.

AB: Thanks.

FC: Well, after you've stayed until they secured the island?

AB: Yeah, I mean, yeah. In fact, we were out there when they dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

FC: What was your feeling at the time? I know you were young, and you were in combat, but what was your feeling at the time?

AB: While I was in combat?

FC: When they dropped the atomic -- when you heard that they dropped the atomic bomb.

AB: Well, at that time, we didn't know what an atomic bomb was, and I had no idea of the concept, and of course the pilots had some college grades, and we all got together and tried to explain it to each other exactly what atomic or an atom was. And I was thrilled to death. I was amazed because I couldn't picture one bomb doing that much damage because we've never had that before. And of course, at that time, they didn't really know how much damage it was going to do either, because they said it might be 100 years before they could get back in the area, which was wrong. But it was just a damn maze to all of us because we couldn't really picture one bomb wiping out that much of a territory or people in --

JE: Did you notice any change in the weather at the time when you were --

AB: No.

JE: When you were there, did you notice it? Did you see any of the effects?

AB: No.

JE: How far away were you?

AB: We were still right at Okinawa when that happened.

JE: So quite a few hundred miles away.

AB: And what really made it nice is we figured after Okinawa, we could go back to the States, take a 30-day leave, and reform a squadron, and get ready to hit the home islands. And we knew that was going to be a really tough part of it on our unit, losing half a million or so men taking the home islands because they were going to fight until the last one.

JE: Oh definitely.

AB: So, that just thrilled just because when we were still on the ship when they signed the peace treaty, [00:35:00] and we heard it, all of them going and signing the peace treaty, so we were thrilled to death that we wouldn't --

FC: I bet you were too thinking about getting back home.

AB: Yeah. The least we feared was the war was over and we wouldn't have to go back in home islands anymore.

FC: Let me ask you this, Albert. Did any of the planes in your squadron, your TBM squadron, TBF squadron, ever shoot down any enemy aircraft? Did your gunners ever get any, or?

AB: Not the TBMs. The fighters probably did. The fighters.

FC: Okay. Your gunners?

AB: No. By the time we got out there, Japan didn't have an Air Force to speak of. Now they were just Kamikazes. So, we really didn't see any enemy aircraft.

FC: Now, how long did you stay after they declared the ceasefire and the armistice? How long was it before you guys headed back to the States?

AB: It seemed like it was pretty soon. We went to Guam, and unloaded at Guam and took a merchant ship back to the States.

FC: Oh, you did?

AB: Yeah.

FC: Huh. They left your ship over there?

AB: Yeah. They left the ship over there. They'd been out there for 18 months when we got there. They put another nine months in, and they still left the ship out there. But we went back to the troop ship from Guam to the States.

FC: Okay, once you got back stateside what did you do?

AB: Well, we had a choice of where we wanted to go, and I chose LA. So, then we took our 30-day leave, and went back and

spent another, I don’t know, three, or four, or five months there working for a discharge. Got a discharge there.

JE: You said that you earned three air medals for there for your combat [aversions?]. What other medals or ribbons did you acquire there?

AB: I don’t know. I had American Theater Warrior, Europe Theater Warrior, AJAC Pacific, I think we had two or three stars in that, and the air medals, and the Philippine liberation, and, gosh I don’t know. I never bothered too much with them. (laughter)

FC: Well, is there any other questions you’d like to ask Albert?

JE: The time that you were at Okinawa, were there any other local islands in the area that you would hit, or was it primarily just Okinawa?

FC: It was primarily just Okinawa.

JE: And you were also in support of the third fleet, is what you were there --

AB: Right.

JE: -- primarily for. Do you remember the names of any of the other ships that were accompanying you?

AB: No, I sure don’t.

FC: That's quite interesting about skip bombing. Did you guys see any actual where you really hit something that really went up?

AB: No.

FC: I've interviewed an Army pilot that, I38, and he skip bombed too.

AB: He did?

FC: Until I got into this, I didn't realize that both the Army and the Navy did skip bombing on land.

AB: Did skip bombing. Yeah. You know we took Panama Canal twice.

JE: Was that a reverse transit?

AB: Yeah. Well, we trained on the west coast. And then we went out for the North Atlantic, we went through the Panama Canal to be stationed in Norfolk. And then we went back to there, and left from San Diego for the Pacific.

FC: When you look back on it, are you glad that you served your country at that time?

AB: Oh yeah, yeah. I wouldn't've missed it for anything. In fact, if my dad had agreed to it, I'd have joined the Navy the day I got out of high school. But I finished high school when I was 16, so I had to wait until I was 17 to do it.

JE: Did your brother join the service?

AB: Pardon?

JE: Did your brother join the service?

AB: Yeah. He was in the Army.

JE: He was in the Army?

AB: Yeah.

JE: Okay.

AB: Yeah. He didn't have to. He was the chief engineer of the Arkansas State Police, and he could have gotten deferments, but he decided to join.

JE: But that was post-war, or was the war still on?

AB: No, the war was still on.

JE: And what theater did he serve in? Was he in --

AB: He was in Europe.

JE: He was in Europe?

AB: Yeah. Yeah.

JE: Germany, or Italy, or?

AB: I know he was in Germany and France. He was pretty much all over Europe on service. It says here, "across the international dateline in March '45."

JE: Did you go to New Guinea, or Australia, or anywhere else there?

AB: No, we just went straight to --

JE: Philippines?

AB: Philippines. We would, right at the end, Guam was the only island we hit down there.

JE: And when you were in, did you go to the home islands? Were you in for the occupation afterwards at all?

AB: No. No were taken back to the States, and I got discharged after that.

FC: All the time that you were in the Navy, Albert, what was the most frightening period that you had, or time? Was it when you were upside down in the water in the plane?

AB: I guess so. But I'll say one thing, that because of our intensive training, the fact that saved my life is the fact that I didn't panic because I knew with that training back then, I knew there was a way out. And without that training, I'd probably gone down with the plane.

FC: Did any of the ships that you were on ever lose any of their crew members, I mean going down like that?

AB: No.

FC: Any kind of accident or?

AB: When we went down, we took one trip down in the South Pacific down to Brazil. And we lost one plane in the water -- we lost two planes on their water landings because of the engine failure. And those two, the nine, that were sat down in the North Atlantic, and the one that I was in, it went over the side. We never lost a man.

FC: My goodness! What a record!

AB: A water landing, if the pilot knows what he's doing, is far, far safer than parachuting.

JE: What was the training for parachuting? How would you get out of the aircraft?

AB: (laughs) We had practically no training for parachuting.

JE: So, would you have to climb over the edge?

AB: No.

JE: Or did you go through the bomb bay?

AB: No, I had a door on the side of the builds there with the release that you could knock the whole door at. And we had our harness on, but then we had chest packs that we slipped on there. It's more like the when the skydivers jump out, their little emergency pack? Well, that was about what we had.

JE: That was your parachute?

AB: Yeah.

JE: It was a chest pack?

AB: Yeah.

JE: Not anything on your back?

AB: No. Now the pilot has a seat pack with, now, I think a tube and life raft and everything on it.

JE: And he'd have to climb out, and he'd go over the --

AB: Yeah.

JE: -- edge of the cockpit.

AB: Yeah. He would. And the gunner had a knockout on the side of his turret that he would flip over out the turret side. And not to get into politics, but while I was never too thrilled about George Bush, he got hit bombing Japan, and he went out and parachuted. Well, he had a parachute with a life raft and all kinds of equipment on there, so he got saved, but his crewmen didn't. All they went out with was their chest pack and their Mae West. And of course, when you jump out like that, you're miles away from each other, and there's no way that anybody can find them. So, I figured if he had set down, even though it was night, if he had tried to make a water landing, all three of them would have gotten back, rather than just him.

JE: In making a water landing, is your position in the aircraft, are either you or the other gunner in the belly, so you're going to be there when you hit? Is that where your seats are? Or do you have some place further up in the aircraft where you can safer --

AB: No, I would be in the belly. The gunner was up in the turret area.

JE: So, you'd be in the belly. So, you had the least chance of survival in a water landing --

AB: Right.

JE: -- because of the way the aircraft's hitting. But your training made it such that you knew where all the emergency switches were, positions, and harness releases, so you would be able to scramble up. And was there a short ladder inside, or?

AB: No. What you do is you pull the lever and the door inside of the --

JE: Popped open?

AB: Popped open. In fact, it fell out. It came completely off.

JE: But it would be underneath the water then. You would be in the water, so it would open?

AB: Yeah.

JE: And then you'd be able to swim to the surface?

AB: Yeah.

FC: Was that door used for anything else except exiting?

AB: We got in. That's where --

FC: You got in that way.

AB: -- got in and out that way. But when you pull that lever, it unleashed the hinges and the entire door fell out.

JE: You were a radio operator aboard the aircraft.

AB: Right.

JE: What sort of radios did it have? Was it HF, UHF, VHF? What were they?

AB: It was just VH. It was --

JE: VHF?

AB: Yeah, and of course we had the radar there. We'd operate the radar down there too. And we didn't have to operate it, but they had 00:46:00] IF -- identification --

JE: IFF.

AB: Yeah. Friend or foe.

JE: Right.

AB: And sometimes while we were flying nights, you could hear the fighter coming up behind you, and identifying it, and waiting for a pulse to go back and truly that we were friendly, (laughs) and you kind of have to be sure that thing was working. (laughter)

JE: So, you could hear the IFF. Because the modern IFFs, you can't hear an IFF-SIF when they work.

AB: Well, you could hear the pilot talking. He was coming out, and he had a target, and he was triggering it. And then you could wait for a few minutes. It wasn't a few minutes, it was a few seconds. (laughter)

JE: Then how well did your radar work?

AB: Great.

JE: It was great radar?

AB: Yeah. Yeah, because we could --

FC: Now, what did you say it was?

AB: We either kept it on the 50-mile range, and then you could switch it down to the 10.

JE: Okay, so you had selective features on the radar. You had a 50-mile range and a 10-mile range?

AB: Yeah.

JE: Were there any other range features that you could change on that?

AB: No. That pretty well got you into the target.

JE: And did you have direction finders or anything like that that you would use also?

AB: No, not on the plane.

JE: And would you use radar to paint weather or anything like that? Could you have that sort of capability?

AB: No, uh-uh.

JE: Not advanced enough to do that.

AB: Advanced. We're back 65 years ago. (laughter)

JE: I understand. The VHF radios, there were no high frequency radios though.

AB: No, not, no.

JE: With the VHF radio, that was both at your position and at the pilot's position?

AB: The pilot had a mic and control with the radios back to back.

JE: So, you would change the channels and all like that.

AB: Yeah.

JE: So, if the pilot wanted to have a different frequency to use, then you would change that?

AB: Yeah.

JE: Did you use 121-5 a lot? The VHF Guard frequency, or what?

AB: Oh god, I don't remember that. (laughs)

JE: The pilot had no com at his position, no communications other than just the microphone?

AB: Right.

JE: The mic, small.

AB: He had a real small radar screen down there, but --

JE: But you adjusted that, and it would aid up there for him?

AB: Yeah, also. And he was more concerned with flying the plane and navigating than watching the radar. That was my job.

JE: Did the plane have a hot mic intercom, or did you have to cue the mics in order to talk to each other?

AB: No, we had to cue the mics in order to talk.

JE: And use the switch position either intercom or radio?

AB: Right, uh-huh.

FC: As a radio operator, of course you didn't go to school, so did you know Morse code?

AB: Oh yeah, yeah.

FC: Did you pick that up as a striker?

AB: No, like I said, I went about, I don't know, six months of school, electronics school, there. And I could copy 16 words a minute.

JE: Sixty words a minute?

AB: Sixteen.

JE: Sixteen?

AB: Yeah. That's what you have to do to get your FCC license. And I knew enough electronics there to -- when I went through, they gave you some little test, and when you're going through boot camp, to find out what you might be fitted in. Of course, I came up great on electronics, and blinker, and stuff like that.

JE: Now, what's blinker?

AB: That's the code with the blinker light.

JE: Okay, on the onboard, okay.

AB: And when they transferred us, we went to Modesto to do our training before going aboard ship. And when I was up there interviewing for that, I put electronics on everything except sex and my age, (laughter) and the guy said, "All this electronics," he said, "you might be good in the radio department," and I said, "You think so?" (laughter) So that's when I got into the radio department. And while I was there, they decided that they wanted us, of course, coming out of boot camp, you're second-class seamen. And

they decided they wanted us all first class, so they sent us into -- and we just got out of boot camp. And they sent this young ensign up. Of course, he was evidently the bottom of the list. It wasn't hard to get that job, and we knew twice as much about seamanship as he did. And he interviewed me, and --

JE: He must've just got out of the naval academy.

AB: He probably did, or came up 90-day wonder. And he got through interviewing, and he said, "Well," he said, "you answered all the questions right," said, "but 4.0 looks a little fishy here. You mind if I put down 3.5 for your grade?" I said, "Okay," so we got rated first class. (laughter) And then when we was out in Okinawa, I took the test for third-class radioman, third class in order to be a combat air crewman. And when we got out on Okinawa, they figured that they always allow you more rate than you actually deserve because they figure some of the guys are not going to come back, so you'll break even on it. So, they literally all of the third class, he was going to give them tests to raise their rate to second class. And me and this Adam [Green?] decide -- the chief radio in the air for 30 days was going to give a two-hour electronic class every night. And Green and I decided we did not want to mess with that, so we said third class is fine for us. And then

the day of the test, the chief came around and said, “Now, I need two alternatives to take the test.” Said, “You all won’t get rated, but in case somebody fails, well, I need a backup.” So, Green and I took the test, we both passed, two guys failed, and we got rated. (laughter)

JE: That’s great. That’s great.

FC: Did you ever have need or did you -- first question, did you have a key, a Morse code key, on your aircraft?

AB: No. No. We never --

FC: So, you never used Morse.

AB: Never used it.

FC: I didn’t think you did.

AB: No. Once or twice, the ship sent blinker messages to us, and we needed to read the blinker. But we didn’t need to do any Morse code, key, and all.

JE: So, that sent like a messenger saying that you just read the blinker message?

AB: Yeah.

JE: But you had no way to respond back to them?

AB: No, uh-uh.

JE: And what was the range of your aircraft? How far could you fly out before you had to turn around and come back?

AB: (laughs) You as me questions that I don’t remember.

FC: He is rogue. (laughter)

JE: What was a standard mission like? How long would you be in the air?

AB: We were out maybe four hours at the most.

JE: Okay, so two hours out, two hours back.

AB: Yeah.

JE: You know, 150 miles an hour max speed, probably 125, so 250, 250 combat radius.

AB: Yeah.

FC: Miss Wilma, is there any stories that we ought to hear that he hasn't mentioned? Wives usually know if it's historic.

WILMA BARTON: There's never a battle that he told me. (laughs)

AB: You can't read my writing, but that's some of the...

FC: What do they call that, your log book?

AB: Yeah, log book.

JE: Panama Canal on Thanksgiving dinner.

AB: Yeah.

FC: See, what Jim is doing is he's reading Albert's log book that he maintained while he was in the Navy.

JE: What's this? It says, "Dates to remember. Panama Canal Zone, Thanksgiving dinner, going through them, Lake," I don't know, whatever the name of the lake is down there. And then you were in Brazil. R-E-C --

AB: Recife.

JE: Recife, Brazil on 4/5/44. You're in Newfoundland on 9/4/44. Panama Canal Zone, 12/24 of '45, so Christmas Eve, Christmas dinner, going through Lake C-A-T-I -- Cazo? What? I forget the name of that lake there in --

AB: Yeah.

JE: -- through Panama Canal. Let's see. Hawaii on 1/10/45, Pearl Harbor. Hila, Hawaii, 1/11/45. Crossed International Date Line 2/28 of '45. Member of the Imperial Domain Golden Dragon. What was that?

AB: That's when you cross the International Date --

FC: You're initiated.

JE: You're initiated?

AB: Yeah.

JE; It looks like Guam on 5/6/45. Palau, 11/45. [Lady?] in the Philippines, 3/11/45. Japan anchored, I can't see the name of that lake. Maybe you might be able to have a better go at it than I can there.

AB: Like I said, my writing has improved. (laughter)

JE: That was pretty good. It's not doctor's writing at least. (laughter)

FC: I never had the pleasure of having a flight book because I never was in flight status.

AB: No?

FC: Well, Albert, is there anything else you'd like to add before we complete this --

AB: No. I don't know that I've added a whole lot to begin with.

FC: Yes, you have. Yes, you have. Well, let me shake your hand. Thank you for your service to our country.

AB: Thank you.

JE: Thank you very much. We truly appreciate it.

AB: Yeah.

JE: Thank you for sharing it with us. And, Wilma, thank you for sharing him with us (laughter) in this amount of time.

WB: You're welcome.

END OF AUDIO FILE