

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Nimitz Education and Research Center**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Roland T. Fisher  
Lake Oswego, Oregon  
February 16, 2011**

**Joined R.A.F. May, 1941  
U.S. 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force December, 1942  
63<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Squadron, B-24 Snoopers  
New Guinea**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is February 16, 2011. I am interviewing Mr. Roland T. Fisher by telephone. His phone number is 503-636-5798. His address is: 1512 Hemlock St, Lake Oswego, Oregon 97034. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Fisher

When my mother was in high school she read that wonderful story about Charlemagne's nephew, Roland. He was the guy that fought the Saracens off at the Battle of Roncevalles in Charlemagne's history. The French wrote an epic poem titled La Chanson de Roland (Song of Roland) and that was translated. She read that when she was in high school and not knowing any better she pronounced it Roland. So even though it should be pronounced Row – lawn, I do along with my mom and go by Roland, so here I am Roland Fisher.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you mind if I call you that? Is that what you go by?

Mr. Fisher

Sure or you might use Smokey. That was my call sign when I flew Night fighters in England and later when I flew night snoopers in the Pacific. I always used the radio call sign Smokey One.

Mr. Misenhimer

Smokey, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Museum. "Agreement read." Is that okay with you?

Mr. Fisher.

That's fine with me, I'm glad to help.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the next thing I would like to do is to get an alternative contact. We have found out that sometimes several years down the road we try to get back in contact with a veteran and he has moved or something. Do you have a son or daughter or someone that we could contact if we needed to find you?

Mr. Fisher

My son, his name is Mark Fisher. His telephone number is 503-203-1449.

Mr. Misenhimer

What town does he live in?

Mr. Fisher

Portland. His mailing address is 3648 SW 60th Place, Portland, Oregon 97221.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Fisher

January 19, 1921.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Fisher

Ainsworth, Nebraska.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Fisher

I had one brother.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he involved in World War II?

Mr. Fisher

He was in World War II. He is deceased. He was a Marine in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did he do during the war? Do you know?

Mr. Fisher

He was basically a grunt. He was combat infantry in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division in the Marines.

Mr. Misenhimer

They made a number of landings over there.

Mr. Fisher

He was hit in two major areas, the last one was Guam. He was hit pretty badly in Guam by a mortar shell.

He went to the hospital from that and never did return to action.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Fisher

I'll never forget it. We lived in Denver in my growing years. Even though I was born in Nebraska, we moved to Denver when I was very young, two or three years old. Denver in those years was geographically a large area but it had no industry. It was basically agricultural. It was definitely lacking in any significant activity, so most of the people had relatively low incomes. My father sold insurance for a living but nobody wanted to buy insurance so we lived on a very meager existence. Sometimes we went without food.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you living in town?

Mr. Fisher

Yes. Generally, we lived in the city of Denver but we rented and because we had so little money, we would move into a house and we couldn't pay the rent after a while and the landlord would kick us out and I think we lived in about 12 or 15 different houses in the years I grew up there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a chance to have a garden?

Mr. Fisher

Yes. In fact that's the way we lived. We always had a garden and it would feed us during the summer months. During the winter months it got pretty tough because we couldn't grow anything. But in the summer Colorado has a lot of sunshine and a beautiful place to grow things. So we always had a garden and we always kept chickens so we had eggs to eat. Sometimes we would kill a chicken.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you managed to survive then?

Mr. Fisher

Yes we managed to survive. One of the interesting things, my father would try to sell insurance. He worked with a clientele that was largely rural people, farmers and ranchers. They never had any money either but they would pay him; they would take out a policy and pay him his commission in produce. He was all the time bringing home half of a pig or a haunch of beef or something like that the farmers would give him as payment. Actually that's how we survived on food and produce that the ranchers would pay my dad with.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Fisher

I graduated from a suburb of Denver called Wheat Ridge.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Fisher

1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Fisher

I had worked in the summers and after school, I worked for various food growers. The area in which I lived had a lot of truck gardening and greenhouses. These people would use menial labor so that's what I did all through high school. I would work in the fields and in those greenhouses just as labor. I would be paid usually 10 cents an hour. I saved my money religiously. I saved enough so that when I got out of high school I was able to enter the Colorado School of Mines. I had enough saved for my first year. That was it and then I ran out.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do after that?

Mr. Fisher

Going back to my younger days, I had always been very strongly involved in taking up aviation and flying. My heroes back then were the great heroes of the war like Eddie Rickenbacker and of course people like Jimmy Doolittle and those people. I used to read, a voracious reader. I read books by the score and I read all about those great aviators and I set my heart on being a flyer. I wanted to be a pilot more than anything else. So I set my goal to join the Army Aviation Cadet Program. It was a very requiring program. You had to have either two years of college or you had to pass a very, very difficult written examination. When I graduated from high school I was 18. One other requirement to join the Army Aviation Cadets, you had to be a minimum of 19 years old. So at the end of my first year in college, I finished Mines because I was out of money, I applied for entrance to the Army Aviation Cadet Corps and I took that written examination, which was really a doozy, and I passed it with a good score. So, on my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, January 19, 1940, I went down to the Army Recruiting Center and I applied to become an Aviation Cadet. I had passed the written score and they accepted that. They promptly began giving me a physical examination. Everything was just wonderful. I could see like an eagle and I could run like a deer. I don't know if you are familiar with this color test they called the Ishihara Color Vision Test, it's a little book in which the pages are circles full of little colored dots. Within those colored dots, a person with normal color vision sees a number. A person with defective color vision, such as I had, couldn't see the numbers. So, everything went well with my physical examination. The nurse then brought out this little book with the colored dots and opened the pages and I read something and she looked at me and she flipped another page and I read something and finally she called over the other nurse and they tried me on a couple more pages. Then they called the doctor. He was a Major in the Army Reserves. He came in and he had me read a couple of pages and what I was doing was reading the incorrect numbers that the color defective people see. So at the end of that, he put his arm around my shoulder and very compassionately said, "Son, I can't pass you. You are never going to be allowed to fly because you are color blind." I don't know if you can understand what it is like to be told something that you don't know. A person that is

color blind has no way of knowing that he is color blind. When I grew up, and when I was growing up I made all kinds of mistakes with colors but I didn't know I was making mistakes. Like for example, in high school I would go to school with one brown and one green sock on. The girls would laugh at me and make fun of me, but I didn't know why. I couldn't see the colors.

So when I got that crushing news, it just absolutely crushed me. I went to the University of Denver Medical School and studied everything I could about color vision. You have to remember this was 1940 and not too much was known about color vision in those days. Not too much is known today about color vision. I read everything I could. I learned about that about 15% of all white males in the world are color blind or color defects. Females never are color defects, but they carry a gene and they pass it on to only their male offspring. That was how I learned that my mother could see colors and read the numbers in that book and I could not. So I got a copy of that book from the University of Denver Medical School and I took it home. My mother would sit beside me and we would turn the pages and there are about 60 different pages, each one was a different color. She would read the correct number and I would see what I saw and I would memorize what she saw. By doing that, I memorized that book. I memorized it. Of course, I was now on record with the Army Air Corps Cadets that I was color defective so I couldn't go back. So I decided that I would learn to fly on my own. By then in 1940, as you recall the war had started in Europe in September 1939, the year I graduated from high school. The result of that was that in Southern California the defense industries were starting to boom, particularly the aircraft industry. They were giving out jobs that were quite unusual that year because it was the end of the Depression. So I hitchhiked to Los Angeles and I got a job and I made 75 cents an hour, can you believe that? Wow! I got this job as a draftsman for 75 cents an hour. I went to work for a company that was making components for airplanes. I would go out every afternoon to east Los Angeles to Montebello and I started taking flying lessons. I put every cent that I could into flying lessons. In May of 1940 I soloed. In June of 1940 I got my license. Then I learned that the RAF was looking for pilots because they were having their difficulties fighting off the Luftwaffe and the terrible attacks that were being made. So, I applied for entrance to the RAF as a volunteer pilot. I had quite a bit of going around but every time they had to give me a physical exam, of course to check me out, but by then I had memorized that color book,

so I could always pass it even though I could not see the numbers. Then in early-1941 the RAF accepted me. They sent me to Tulsa, Oklahoma to start getting refresher flying. I had my private pilot's license by then but it was in a light aircraft. They sent me to Tulsa where the Spartan Flying School had a program going that was training British Aviation Cadets better than in England. So they let a handful of us Americans join those classes as volunteers. We were called strictly volunteers because we were still civilians even though our British contemporaries were in the military, we were still considered civilians.

Mr. Misenhimer

About what date was that?

Mr. Fisher

May of 1941 was when I was accepted by the RAF and sent to Tulsa. So I was given about four or five months of training in heavier aircraft. I don't know if you remember the famous Harvard AT-6. That was the outstanding trainer that cadets were taught to fly in before they went on to military operational models. So I got a lot of time flying heavy aircraft Harvards and I was taught instrument flying and night flying. I got a very good education in this refresher course, along with the British Cadets. Then in that fall, the RAF gave me a handful of money and told me, "You are your own. You have to travel to England." There were some concerns by the American government also the British government that by Americans volunteering for the British Service they might lose their American citizenship. So this was avoided by all Americans, and there were about 1,000 of us altogether that joined the Royal Air Force, that we avoided the loss of our citizenship by not swearing allegiance to the king. We took an oath as a gentleman that we would always obey our commanding officer, whoever he might be. That was acceptable to the British. And that, according to our own government and the State Department, was not swearing allegiance to a foreign power and thus we were not stripped of our American citizenship. That's how we all entered the RAF as volunteers.

I happened to be in Canada on December 7, 1941 on my way to England as a civilian. That was the day that the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Of course, now I'm in a dilemma. I want to go on with my own plans. I'm committed to go to the British. So I went to the American Embassy in Ottawa and asked them what I should do. They checked with the military and they said, "Because of the confusion



and the lack of preparedness on the part of the United States, there was no way they could fold us into their military and that they wanted us to go on with our plans to serve with the British. At some later date they would let us transfer into the U.S. forces.” So I went on and I crossed the Atlantic and went to England and was commissioned into the RAF in early 1941. In early 1941 I was commissioned as a pilot officer in the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up, on December 7, 1941 you were in Ottawa, it would have to be 1942.

Mr. Fisher

In early 1942, right after Pearl Harbor, I crossed the Atlantic. So it was in January of 1942 that I was commissioned in the British service.

You know what was happening to America right after Pearl Harbor. We lost the Philippines. We lost a big part of our Navy and most of our Air Force was wiped out. I was a member of the RAF and I was gaining tremendous experience. I always had this problem of not being able to see colors so I had memorized this color test book in order to pass the test. I always passed the test but I still could not see colors. So I had a very complicated way as I was flying to be able to see the colors of the various signals that I was watching. I don't know if you are aware of how colors work but when we were flying; we generally had to obey color signals that were either red, green, or yellow. Red, of course, meant 'stop' and green meant 'proceed' and yellow meant 'be careful'. I could not distinguish between red and green when I would follow it with my naked eye. Are you familiar with what the British wore in those days? We wore what was called a battle jacket. Eisenhower made it very popular after the war. It was a jacket with two breast pockets. In those breast pockets I carried two pieces of colored plastic. In my right pocket I carried a piece of green plastic and in my left pocket I carried a piece of red plastic. When I would see a colored light from my aircraft, which was usually in the form of either a lamp or a Very flare, if it looked bright I would pull out my green filter from right pocket and I would look at it. If the light was green, and I was looking at it through my green filter, the light would come through very strongly. If it was a red light, the green filter that I was looking at would tend to cancel out a lot of the red and the light would get very dim. So that is how I could tell red from green while I was flying my aircraft. It took me a few seconds but I

was able to get by and I did it for the rest of the war. I never made a mistake and couldn't see any of the colors.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of plane were you flying there?

Mr. Fisher

I began flying Oxfords, which is the twin engine. It looks like a miniature, well not miniature; it is maybe 3/4ths the size of a DC-3. It looks a lot like it. It was a cargo carrier and a trainer. I flew those quite a bit. I got 200 – 300 hours in Oxfords. Then I was checked out in some heavier aircraft. The RAF liked my quality of flying so much; they thought I was an outstanding pilot, that they wanted me to become an instructor. So they sent me to a special instructor's school in Scotland. This was in the late summer of 1942. I went through this instructor school and I was made a Special Instructor Pilot by the RAF. So my job was to help the pilots that were having difficulty with their flying. I carried that out. I did most of this at night. I did a lot of night flying. I had unusually good night vision so they assigned me to night training for pilots that were having difficulty with their night flying. I spent the rest of the time in the RAF doing that work. Then in December of 1942, I got instructions from my commanding officer to report to the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force for transfer from the RAF to the U.S. Army 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. But before I left they said they were very grateful for my service to their RAF in the year that I had spent helping them and they wondered if there was anything that I would like to do. I said, "I have always wanted to fly a Spitfire." I was so taken by the beauty of the Spitfire fighter that I said, "Could I be checked out in one?" They were so grateful that instead of just checking me out, they sent me to a special Spitfire training school and allowed me to go through the entire class as my reward for my service in the RAF. Then at the end of that class I went to London and transferred to the U. S. Army 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. That was in December 1942.

When I transferred I was made a Lieutenant in the U. S. Army Air Corps. I was put into B-17 bombers. I flew those a little bit. The U. S. looked at my record and found that I had this exceptional flying ability as an instructor especially at night. There was a Major who was Hap Arnold's special assistant. His name was Winston Kratz. He was forming a special U.S. Night fighter arm. At that time the British excelled at night fighting with a combination of their radar and specially trained Night Fighter

pilots. The U.S. Air Corps did not have anything like that. So Hap Arnold commissioned Winston Kratz to form a U. S. night fighting arm that was patterned after the way the British did their Night Fighters. Kratz collected 33 of us Americans who were volunteers in the RAF who had special night training. I was one of those 33. They took us back to Florida and we set up a Night fighter training school. That was in early 1943 that we got to Florida. In Orlando we set up this special Night fighter training school and then we would train newly graduated American pilots using the British techniques of Night fighters and ground radar. I instructed in that for a while. Then in September 1943 they formed the first American Night fighter squadron, the 418<sup>th</sup> Night Fighter Squadron, to take us to the Pacific to fight against the Japanese. So I was made the operations officer of that squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the number, the call number, of that squadron?

Mr. Fisher

The 418<sup>th</sup> Night Fighter Squadron. I was made the operations officer and then in September or October, I forget just which, we went across the Pacific to New Guinea where we set up as the first Night Fighter squadron in the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force in New Guinea. Unfortunately the techniques that the British had used in their tiny little island just did not work in the widely dispersed battlefield of the Pacific. It was a totally different kind of war, totally different war. So the U.S. 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force commanders decided that the night fighting unit was a waste of pilots and airplanes, so they decided they wanted to make it into some other kind of squadron. They used us as antiaircraft destroyers and that type of thing. Needless to say because the squadron was not trained for that sort of thing we had very heavy losses. About that time, this was about January 1944; the U. S. Fifth Air Force called me over to Fort Moresby and said that in looking over my record they had found that I had special training with the British at night and air borne radar. I said, "Yes, that's correct." So, they said they were forming a new squadron of night raiders. They were going to be B-24s, four engine bombers. They were bringing the air craft over from Langley Field and they would be over by the end of January or first of February and they wanted me to join that squadron as a pilot. It was going to be a unit of bombers that carried air borne radar in which I had experience and the mission would be primarily to seek out Japanese ships at night and destroy them. So I was assigned to the

63rd Bomb Squadron, which was nicknamed "World War II Snoopers." I spent the rest of the war until March 1945 flying with the 63rd Bomb Squadron as a pilot and doing anti-shiping work primarily anti-shiping work. I flew from bases in New Guinea all the way up into the Philippines. My last base was at Clark Field in Luzon in the Philippines. That was in March 1945. I was pretty well worn out by then so they sent me home.

During that time I had one very unusual experience. It was in September 1944. I was flying a B-24 Liberator and my mission was to take off from this New Guinea island, which was a little island called Owi. It was in northwestern New Guinea which at that time was owned by the Dutch. It was known as Dutch New Guinea. Our base at Owi was a good spot because it was strategically positioned so that we could go out into the Pacific between New Guinea and the Philippines and seek out and destroy Japanese shipping, which was very important for the Japanese military. We did this at night, which was to our advantage. This particular night I was assigned to fly to the Philippines from Owi and look for ships and I was to especially go into Davao Gulf. On the southern island of Mindanao there is a big gulf and the city of Davao is up at the head of that gulf and I was assigned to go into the gulf and look for Jap ships and attack them. Generally, if we could not find ships we had a secondary target, which would usually be a Japanese air base. That particular night I looked through the Davao Gulf and I did not find any ships so I went to my secondary target which was Matina Airbase in the city of Davao. It was on the island of Mindanao. I climbed up to about 5,000 feet and made a bomb run on this airbase and the Japanese caught me pretty well it looked like, but I continued with my bomb run and dropped my bombs and turned off to get out into the night and was attacked by a Japanese Night fighter. He came in behind me as I was flying away from my target and he shot me full of holes with his canons and wounded a couple of my crewmen pretty badly. I did not know why he did this until some years later, but what I learned later was that his guns jammed while he was firing at me. His guns jammed and he decided that since he couldn't get me with his guns he would knock me down with his propellers. So he struck me with his aircraft and his propeller chewed the whole bottom of my airplane off and knocked out his right engine and put me into a dive. I very nearly hit the water but I pulled up in time and got away. I just almost hit the water. I pulled up and got away into the dark with a very badly crippled airplane. I had six hours in the night to get back

to my base at Owi but I made it and landed that morning. When we set down and got our wounded crewmen off. Then we looked at the rear of the airplane and that is when we discovered that we had been hit with another airplane. I didn't know that until I looked at. We found pieces of his canopy sticking in my airplane. So, we assumed that his airplane had been wrecked and knocked down and I was given credit for knocking down a Japanese fighter. What I didn't know was that he had gotten back minus one engine. He was flying a twin-engine fighter. He got back and safely landed and crashed in my bomb crater and he was very badly wounded and almost lost the sight in one eye. When he hit my airplane it smashed the windshield into his face, but he survived. He got out of the hospital and went to Japan and continued to fight the war for Japan flying fighters. I learned all of this afterwards. Some 20 years later I was reading a little book that was all about the efforts of these so-called kamikaze pilots. They were pilots that were dedicated to destroying themselves if necessary in order to destroy the U.S. targets. He had taken that oath that night before he took off from Mindanao. He had taken the oath of the kamikaze. It is a very complicated thing and has to do with warrior's code and Japanese code and all that. That's how I learned while reading this book, that his guns had jammed and he decided that he was going to ram me, which he did. Then I learned that he had successfully landed and crashed and lived and survived the crash. So I was so fascinated by the fact that he had survived the impact that I called the publishers of the book. A fellow by the name of Roger Pineau, who was then the curator of the Museum of Science and Industry at the Smithsonian, was the American author of the book. The book was titled "Divine Wind: Japan's Kamikaze Force in WWII." I called Roger and I told him that I had read in his book that my adversary had survived and that I was fascinated by it and I wondered if there was a possibility that he had survived the war. Roger was also equally interested, so he said he would do his best to find out. It took him two years. He did a lot of inquiries and calls. One day, two years after I had contacted him after reading the book, he called me and he said, "Roland, I have located a man in Kyushu, Japan with the same name as your former adversary, but he will not admit that he was the guy. I suggest you write him a very personal letter and tell him the circumstances." So I did. I wrote this letter which in it I expressed my amazement that he had survived and that he was the one. I said that I would really like to meet him and shake his hand if I could. In a couple of weeks I got a reply and it was him. He said that he was the guy.

He didn't want to admit it because for him it was a huge loss of face because he had been given credit for knocking me down, even though he crashed when he got back. He said that he had filled me full of holes and he had struck me with his airplane and the last I saw of my plane, I was diving into the water. The he said he had to land. The Japanese Air Force gave him credit for knocking me down and my Commanding General; General Kenny gave me credit for knocking the Japanese fighter down. A dual comedy of errors. So anyway, for him it was a loss of face. Remember, he was a defeated warrior. They had lost the war and in the eyes of his country he was a nothing. This one of the few things that he had to cling to was his victory over me. Now that was gone, so that was a terrible disgrace for him. It worked out. We became very good friends. I went over to Japan and visited him in 1971. Life Magazine got very interested in my visit with him and my story and they published, I think it was in 1971, they published a very interesting article with pictures. They sent a photographer with me when I went to visit him. So there is a very good article in Life, which you might be interested in seeing. I could make a copy and send it to you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, I would like that, if you could.

Mr. Fisher

I will do that. The upshot is that I had a wonderful visit with him and met his family and we were heavily publicized in Japan because of the experience we both had. At that time he was struggling to earn a living. He had a small construction company. The publicity that resulted from my meeting him in Japan gave him so much exposure that he became quite wealthy as a result of it. He got a lot of business and the company grew.

When I got back to the United States after visiting him, I got a call one day from Dick Cavitt, who was a night show host on TV. He wanted to know if I would be on his show and I agreed. Dick Cavitt made arrangements to bring Yoshimasa Nakagawa, my adversary, him and his wife over. He came here to Portland for a weekend and we just had a wonderful visit. I barbequed him a spring salmon. That was in the spring of 1972, I think. So we had a wonderful visit. Then he and his wife and my wife and I got on a United plane and went to New York and we were on the Dick Cavitt show. To this day I regret

they didn't have video in those days, so I don't have a video tape of it. I sure would have liked it. (*End of tape side one.*)

Mr. Misenhimer

So you all went to New York to see Dick Cavitt.

Mr. Fisher

We had a wonderful time on the Dick Cavitt show in New York and then he (Nakagawa) and his wife told us that they had always read about three different things that they wanted to see in the States. One of them was Niagra Falls and one was the Statue of Liberty and the third one was Disneyland. They wanted to go to Disneyland. That was the last time I saw him. We said goodbye in New York and he and his wife visited those places and then went back to Japan. I returned to Portland and resumed my life. We continued to correspond and I guess one of the most notable things that happened was some years later, he had been so grateful for my helping him with that wonderful trip to the United States and being able to see the thing that he wanted, that he had made for me a Samurai Sword. It is one of the most beautiful things you will ever see in your life. I have pictures of it if you would like for me so send you one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Fisher

I will do that and I will mail that along with a copy of the Life article. He sent me this magnificent Samurai Sword that he had commissioned to have made. It required a special act on the part of the Japanese Parliament to get it out of the country because it was considered a national work of art. They passed a special act in the Diet and he sent it to me as a gift. I still have that. Naturally, I think a great deal of it. He is an old, old geezer like I am. My hair is white and his hair is gray and he has a lot wrinkles on his face. We haven't seen each other, but we still stay in touch. One of the interesting things that he said to me, he said this in New York while we were talking. We were talking about our experience and the fact that we had this where we both thought we had killed each other and it ended up that we hadn't. He said, you have to consider his religion if that's what you want to call it, he is Shinto. I'm a Christian and he is Shinto. This has always struck me as something very compassionate, he said, "You know, for the both of

us to have tried to kill each other and for both of us to have survived, it must have been the work of God.” I thought that was quite unusual for a Shinto to say. Anyway, here we are, I’m 90 and he is about 88 or 89. He is a couple of years younger than I am. We are in our last years, probably, but we made it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he speak English?

Mr. Fisher

No. He is very conservative. He lives in Kyushu and that is the southern island of Japan. He had a son and three daughters. His eldest daughter spoke fluent English, so that’s how we communicated. She writes his letters for him, so that’s how we get along. When I was in Japan we also had a translator. I didn’t know he was the Life photographer too. He was our translator and he went with us wherever we went to visit. He carried a camera and he took all these pictures and that’s how the Life article appeared. I didn’t know at the time that he was taking all these pictures for Life. He was a good guy and he did a good job translating for us. We got along fine with the help of his daughter and the translator who spoke English, while I was in Japan. When he was in New York we had a translator that was an employee of Japan Airlines. She was with us on the Dick Cavitt show. If I can ever find that voice recording and give you a copy, you will hear her voice on it translating as he and I spoke back and forth. We always had somebody that could speak both languages that helped us to speak to each other. It was just like being able to talk to each other without any interference.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were with the Snoopers there in New Guinea, how many different missions did you fly?

Mr. Fisher

I don’t know. In England I flew lots of short mission because that is what my life consisted of there; just short, two or three hour missions into the night. I probably did that a hundred times. But when I was in the Pacific they were very long missions. We would take off in the evening and fly all night and come back in the early daylight. I did 32 of those missions. I had altogether about, I think about 750 – 800 hours of combat flying. For one of those, that was my being able to get my ship back quickly and save ourselves, myself and the crew, I was given the Distinguished Flying Cross by General Kenny. That was



not the only tough mission that I had. Lots of those missions in the Pacific were very rough, very hard, mostly because of the bad weather.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that quite a few of the Snooper planes were lost because of bad weather and things.

Mr. Fisher

Our losses in the Pacific were tremendous because of the weather. The weather was horrific. You have got to remember, in those years it was a very primitive part of the world. There were no navigational aids of any kind. When we took off we were just strictly on our own out in the night. Many times I flew into horrible weather which just about tore me apart, but I made it. Yes, we had a lot of losses because of weather. You know it's interesting, they are still finding airplanes at New Guinea that had crashed in to the mountains and in to the jungles during the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you attacked by Japanese planes on other flights down there?

Mr. Fisher

No, that was the only time that I was ever hurt by an aircraft. Although several times when I would attack a ship they would hit me with antiaircraft fire, but I never got damaged badly enough to knock me down. I have had my aircraft damaged a half dozen times by gunfire, but that was the only time I was ever damaged by a Japanese fighter. That was a bad one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly the same plane all the time, or different planes?

Mr. Fisher

No. The 63<sup>rd</sup> Squadron usually had a total of about 13 aircraft available. But we had lost, I think, over the course of the two years I was with the 63<sup>rd</sup>, we lost about a half dozen aircraft, including the one for example that I was flying the night that he hit me. They had to junk the airplane it was so badly damaged. It was a unique squadron. It was the only squadron in the Pacific that had this airborne radar that enabled us to take off and see through the night and navigate our way around such a huge area and hit our targets. It was a wonder that we didn't lose more, but actually we had a very good record. We were credited with

sinking almost 200,000 tons of enemy shipping. I think in those two years of the war we lost only five or six aircraft. It was a pretty good record.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened there in the Pacific?

Mr. Fisher

When we talked earlier you asked me if I had seen any USO shows and one of my favorites was when Bob Hope came over and entertained us. We were on that island of Owi that I told you about. When Bob would come out to the Pacific we had an old, what we called a fat cat. It was an operational B-24 but it had worn out with so much service. We stripped it of its armament and used it to fly down to Australia to pick up supplies and to bring them back up to us. So when we knew he was coming we painted on the nose of it "Bob's Hope." We named the airplane "Bob's Hope." We used that to go down and pick him up and bring him up. I have a picture of him when he came and entertained us at Owi that I've always treasured. It shows him standing at the microphone in front of the name on the airplane, "Bob's Hope." It is rather dim, but I can see it in my little book. We have a little book called "World War II Snoopers." It is a composite of the experiences of all of us different pilots that were snooper pilots. An anthology. If you would like I can send you a copy of that book.

Mr. Misenhimer

If you have an extra one, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Fisher

I'll do that and you will see in it the picture of Bob in it and a picture of the airplane "Bob's Hope." The way we made this book was each of the members of the World War II Snoopers Squadron narrated our different experiences and we put them together and made an anthology. So I have a specific section in the book in which I narrate my experiences in New Guinea and tell a couple of stories that might be interesting to you. One of them for example, the hazards that we went through were not just from flying combat. We had lots of other risks; mainly a lot of us got sick all the time from the diseases that were in the places we lived. There were all kinds of diseases in those days. I had about everything. I had malaria, and I had Dengue. One time I almost got killed. I almost lost my life with an engine. My commanding

officer put me in charge of the airstrip at Leyte in Tacloban in the Philippines. When we first moved back into the Philippines in October 1944, we landed on the island of Leyte and we took the one airstrip on the island. We took that over from the Japanese and we pushed them back into the jungle. That was the only airstrip in the Philippines that we had. We moved all of our fighters and bombers to get on to this one airstrip. The Japanese just constantly attacked us. It was a nightmare. We had a lot of casualties from Japanese bombers coming over and dropping bombs on us. It was such a rough deal my commanding officer said, "Fisher, I want you to take charge of this airstrip and run it at night and make sure we can keep it going." This one particular night, that afternoon I had landed a whole bunch of Corsairs that had been on the carrier *Princeton* during the Navy battles that were taking place around the Philippines. The Japanese had sunk the *Princeton* and their airplanes had to have some place to land and the only place they could land was this airstrip at Tacloban. So I was in charge and I got all of these fighters in and I had them lined up and down the airstrip. It was kind of a long peninsula that stuck out into the bay. It had a swamp one side and a beach on the other side. I had these Corsairs lined up and down the beach alongside the airstrip and I had a Navy B-24 that had been struck by antiaircraft. I had it parked there. Just at dusk a Japanese airplane came in and it looked like one of ours. It was a copy of a DC-3. The pilot called in and asked for landing instructions. We didn't know it was actually a transport full of suicide paratroopers. What he wanted to do was to come in and drop those paratroopers along the strip and just create chaos among this mob of airplanes that we had. One of our antiaircraft batteries at the end of the strip, it was just dark, and I was alongside the airstrip. I had just used a bulldozer to pull this Navy B-24 back off the strip because his wheels had been hit by antiaircraft and he was stuck. I had a jeep. I was just climbing into the jeep when this Japanese airplane came over and lined up with the airstrip and it was dark and I thought, "Oh god, what if it is a bomber and he is going to drop bombs?" I ran and hid behind this cletrack, a big bulldozer like machine. It was the safest place that I could be if he dropped bombs. The antiaircraft battery hit his right engine and he swerved. He straightened out and he came down the airstrip on his belly and he clipped the tails off of about a half dozen of these Corsairs that I had just brought in. He hit a whole bunch of them and he killed and wounded a bunch of Americans that were hiding under the airplanes. Then he hit this cletrack that I was hiding behind and it exploded. So here I am all of a

sudden in the middle of this fire and I ran and jumped into the water. I didn't get burned very badly; I just got my hair singed. I got the fire put out and then I ran back and the Japanese aboard the airplane were running around burning and they were trying to shoot their guns. It was just a heck of a mess. We finally killed all of those Japanese. To this day I have the pistol from the pilot of that plane that crashed into us. I came within inches of being killed myself. There were a lot of different ways that you could die out there. All kinds of ways. It was very easy to die. You didn't have to work hard to find a way to do it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other of your close calls?

Mr. Fisher

I think that was probably the worst one. There were other difficulties but they just related to the missions we had to fly. There were no navigation aids. When we were at the base at Buna, which was a big swamp area. We had three airstrips there. The swamps were just full of rotting corpses from the Japanese and Americans that had been killed in the war. It was a miserable place to live. We would take off in the evening when we would go out on a mission during the night. When we came back, frequently the swamp areas where our three airstrips were would fog up so it would clear out over the water but when you tried to find your airstrip all you would see is a blanket of fog laying there over the jungle. There were big mountains about four miles in the back. The way we used to have to land, there was an old sunken Japanese transport out in the bay. So we would line up over the clear blue water with that Japanese wreck and take a bearing and fly into the fog towards our airstrip for so many minutes, we would count, and if at the end of that count, we didn't see an airstrip we would have to make a very sharp turn or we would be into that mountain. So more than once I had to come back and fly into that fog and count, at the end of my three minutes I just barely got a glimpse of the airstrip, dropped by wheels and flaps, and got down on the ground and just go with the fog. That was the wonderful way we had to land our airplanes. Some guys didn't make it. Some of them hit the mountain.

I have recounted quite a bit of my years of experience and if you would like I will get a copy of this book to you. There are some pictures in it and it shows the things that we did besides flying in the war like for example, we had a miserable diet. I don't know if you heard, but it was very difficult to get

good food out into this area. Transport was difficult so we didn't have fresh eggs and fresh milk or anything like that. So everything that came out was dehydrated potatoes and dehydrated lemon juice and that kind of thing. Our tent area was right on the beach, down below the airstrip at Owi. We would go out in a pair of GI shoes and walk around on the edge of the reef and we would fish. We would throw sticks of dynamite over that were tied to a stone and they would go down and explode under water and that would stun the fish and some of these fish would float to the top and we would capture them and so we had fresh fish. There is a picture in this book of our weatherman and me and we are getting a bunch of these fish. This was a huge component of our diet, these fresh fish, because everything else was dehydrated. About the only good food that I can ever remember that we got besides the fish was the bread that our cooks would bake. Every morning they would get up and bake fresh bread and that was good. The rest of the food was absolutely not. Those are items that are described in my book. Living in the jungle and how we ate and how we lived. How the Japanese would attack us constantly because it was so easy for them to find this little island and drop bombs on it. We had a very exciting life.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Fisher

I tell you when bad things would happen they would happen so quickly that I don't think I was ever really frightened. I have had several experiences in which I almost died. I was just inches from death but it happened so quickly that you don't think about being scared, you just think about surviving. I had several experiences like that, like when I was hiding behind that tractor when the Japanese plane hit. My only thought was "Let's get this fire out," and I ran and jumped into the water. It wasn't exactly frightening. It was exciting but not frightening. I don't think I was ever really scared. It was a job you had to do and we would lose members of our squadron and it was sad, but it was one of those things that happened. It was war. That's what happens in war. I think the most frightening thing; I had sad moments but not frightening. I remember very much the saddest moment of my life. It was so sad that I wrote a story about it. I sent it down to the *Oregonian*. It came about because one of our columnists here at the *New Oregonian* wrote a story about visiting an American cemetery in Italy. He recorded how sad it was

because the only people that ever come to visit the graves, these were Americans that died in the landing at Anzio, and there are about 4,000 Americans buried in this cemetery. He said it was sad because the only people that ever came to visit were Italians. No Americans ever showed up. There was only one American there and that was the American who was assigned to be the caretaker of the cemetery. He was complaining that there no Americans visitors. When I read that it touched me because I think about all the guys and all the friends that I had. I lost a lot of friends and that is part of it. I got to thinking about all these guys that are buried there and nobody comes to visit them. And I got to thinking that the saddest thing are those who died that don't even have a grave for anybody to visit them, particularly this friend of mine with whom I flew in the RAF. He and I became very close friends. He was in a fighter squadron so our lives digressed and he was sent off to the Middle East and then he ended up down in Australia fighting against the Japanese. Two years after I last saw him in London, I landed one day on a little island with my bomber. I landed at this island to stage, to get bombs and then fly out of there and attack a Japanese target. Of all the incredible things, here was my friend flying as a fighter pilot off that little island. It was a wonderful event to get to see him but less than 24 hours later he was killed. Still to this day that was one of the saddest moments of my life. I'll send you a copy of this book.

Mr. Misenhimer

Send me anything you can. We are glad to get all of this.

*February 17, 2011*

*Continuation of Oral History with Roland Fisher*

Mr. Misenhimer

In your article you said that in Tulsa you flew something called a Spartan Executive. You said that was a plane ahead of its time. What kind of plane was that?

Mr. Fisher

Oh yes, very much so. When I volunteered for the Royal Air Force I was living in Los Angeles and I went through an organization called the Clayton Knight Committee. They were the ones recruiting pilots for the RAF. When they give me a test flight and I passed okay, they sent me to Tulsa, Oklahoma to the

Spartan School of Aeronautics. There I received some refresher flying training while I was waiting for my transportation to England. That was when I was checked out in the famous AT-6, the famous Harvard trainer, which was the heaviest airplane I had flown up to that time. I also was given time in the Spartan Executive. It was a magnificent airplane. As you say, it was way ahead of its time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it a single engine?

Mr. Fisher

Yes, it was a single engine. I think it was six-passenger including pilot and copilot and seats for four passengers. It had a low wing. It was a very sleek aluminum, all metal aircraft with a low wing and retractable gear for landing. I think it had a 450 hp Pratt and Whitney engine. It was a very powerful engine for those days. It was very fast. It could really move along. I believe a few years ago I saw one here in the Portland area in an air show. I believe there are still some in existence. I don't know how many they built but there weren't very many. I know they are a real collector's item.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in England, what kind of plane did you fly there for that Night Fighter?

Mr. Fisher

I started out in a twin engine school and I first flew Oxfords and then I was checked out in a Beaufighter. That is a twin engine very high performance fighter. I was also given about 100 hours in a Spitfire before I left the RAF as a reward for my service.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you over there working as a Night Fighter, you were flying the Beaufighter?

Mr. Fisher

Yes. It was very effective during the day. The Aussies were wild pilots. They used the Beaufighter as a low level attack plane. They were very effective against Japanese ships and barges and anti-aircraft. They were a wild bunch. They set up a factory in Australia and they built the Beaufighter there. So they had a good supply of them. They had several squadrons that they operated in the daytime as attack aircraft; low level support.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many missions did you fly in the Beaufighter there in England?

Mr. Fisher

Not very many actually because I was snagged by the RAF as an instructor. They liked my quality. They thought I was a well above-average pilot. The first thing they did after I went through this twin-engine training, they sent me to an instructor's school. Then they wanted me to act as the check-pilot for all kinds of pilots in the Royal Air Force. I had to beg. I wanted to fly combat but they just insisted that I do this instructor duty. So I couldn't get very much time in a Beaufighter. I was checked out in one and I went through the various procedures. I learned the various procedures that the RAF used for night interceptions. I never really got to fly what was called a combat mission. Of course all of England was a combat zone and we were always subject to an attack but I never did get to go on any cross-channel missions on which I lost several of my friends. As I told you, I was only with them for a year and then in December of 1942 I transferred to the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. They set me up to fly in B-17s but because of my special night training by the RAF, Major Winston Kratz grabbed a hold of me along with about 32 other Americans who had been given special night training. The key thing we were trained in was the use of airborne radar. That was what made the British Night Fighters so effective. They had outstanding ground support radar systems that covered the entire island very effectively. With that ground support, when the Germans would come in with a bomber, ground radar could pick him up and track him and then direct a Night Fighter into him quickly and the Night Fighter airborne radar would take over at a distance of about 8 to 10 miles. The radar observer in the back of the aircraft could then direct the pilot to fly in behind the enemy and attempt to shoot him down. So it was a very sophisticated procedure. That was what I was trained in but I never really got to do any combat missions. But because I was trained in that, the U.S. thought I was a valuable item, so when I entered the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force they sent me to Florida to help set up a night fighter training center using the British techniques. There we flew an American night fighter which was called the P-70 and it was an adaptation of the twin engine Douglas called the Boston or Havoc. We had a special night version that carried radar and instead of bombs in the bomb bay they had four 20mm canons. The aircraft was used as a night fighter instead of a low level attack bomber. The Air Force had



converted it to a night fighter. It was not a very good night fighter. It was not as effective as the Beaufighter. It was not as maneuverable. It was a very good low level high speed attacker but it was not really any good at trying to follow a nimble Japanese bomber. When we got out into the Pacific, as I told you earlier, after I served as an instructor in this school in Florida for about three or four months, then I was sent out to the Pacific as the operations officer for the 418 Night Fighter Squadron. But in the Pacific, it was not a good system because of the difference of the geography in the theater. Where England was a tight little island and could effectively cover it with their ground radar, in the Pacific, you were flying over a huge ocean with little islands here and there. So it was not very effective. This ground radar was just no good at all. You couldn't pick up enemy aircraft in time. Even when we could get in behind one, we couldn't keep up with one. The Japanese aircraft were very fast and very maneuverable. That P-70 just didn't work as a good night fighter. So after I was in that, I think that was from October 1943 to January 1944, the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force called me over and said, "We understand you have training in using airborne radar and we have this new squadron of B-24s equipped with airborne radar and we want to put you in that."

Mr. Misenhimer

In your letter to the World War II Magazine you mentioned that you were not in an Eagle squadron.

Mr. Fisher

I was not in an Eagle squadron, no. Eagle squadrons were daytime fighter squadrons. Initially some of them flew Hurricanes but eventually they all ended up flying Spitfires. The first squadron was 71 and the next squadron that was formed was 133 and then I think the third squadron was 601. I'm not sure of that number. There were three Eagle squadrons. They were all American pilots but they had British commanders until later in the war when two of the squadrons were finally commanded by American pilots. One of them was named Gordon Peterson. He was the commander of 71 Eagle Squadron. They were daytime and I was in a totally different part of the war flying twin engine night fighters.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned that you used to go to a club with them. What club was that?

Mr. Fisher

I should bring that up. There were two very famous American entertainers. They were movie stars. One of them was named Bebe Daniels and the other was named Ben Lyon. They were husband and wife. After they became famous in American movies they went to England and became very popular in British entertaining circles. So when the war started and we began to have these American volunteers, because they were still American citizens but they were in effect living as English people, they set up a special vocation. It was called the American Eagle Club. They used their own money to fund this and set it up and rent property. The address was at 28 Charring Cross Road in London, England. It different matter what unit you were flying in, you always ended up meeting the other American comrades at the Eagle Club. It was the place in London that all of us would go as soon as we would be on leave. We would always go to London to go on leave. Any American pilot on leave, when he hit London he would head for the Eagle Club. You got to meet everybody else that was in the RAF. We also got to meet Ben and Bebe. They were very gracious hosts. They arranged for a lot of different entertaining things for us. We got free passes to the stage shows and the movies. On one occasion I was invited to Buckingham Palace and had lunch. Then the Queen came in and said hello and welcomed us. That was a very interesting experience and I had a lot of fun doing that. Ben and Bebe were great. They were our godfather and our godmother. Through that process, every American, no matter what he flew in the RAF got to know every other American. I met so many of these fellows who were in the Eagle Squadron and got to know them well even though I did not fly as an Eagle Squadron member myself. When you get my essay about my friend Johnny, I talk about that. I describe just how he and I met. He was a Spitfire pilot and I was a twin engine pilot but we met at the Eagle Club. They were great people, very close.

I don't know just how well you remember American movies, but one of the most famous aeronautic movies that was ever made was "Wings" about World War I. Ben Lyon was the star in that movie. If you ever see the old movie "Wings" be sure and watch it because you will see my wonderful host, Ben Lyon.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've got another question for you. There in the Pacific, you talked about one flight where you had St. Elmo's fire.

Mr. Fisher

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell about that.

Mr. Fisher

That was an amazing phenomenon. I'm not sure just what causes it physically. It has to do with static electricity discharges and it is a cousin to lightning. It forms when you fly through atmospheric conditions that have clouds that have certain electrical charges. This particular experience that I had, I was flying on this night mission. A single plane. As we went along I entered this area that had not very much turbulence but lots of wet clouds. As I entered it, the first thing that happened is my propeller tips started to glow. They got a blue fluorescence. The tips glowed. As I progressed into this area, the propellers became giant blue wheels. My nose gunner, who of course was in the compartment up ahead of the pilot's compartment, the tips of his guns would stick up just a little, when they were in the firing position, the tips of his guns would stick up just a little in my vision. His name was Bowling. As we were going along, the tips of his guns started to glow. He called back, he was a little hillbilly from West Virginia, and he said, "Hey Captain, my guns are on fire." And I said, "It's not that, it's just a kind of static discharge. Don't worry about it." Well anyway, as we progressed into this, the whole airplane just became permeated with this blue static and it came into the cockpit. My throttle handle started to glow. Anything that had a tip to it. Finally my hand started to feel prickly, the backs of my hands. The hairs on my arms started to stand up like the hair on a dog's back and it was a little blue ball of flame on the end of each hair. It was a weird, weird experience. I went on. I kept going. In about another 30 minutes, my target that night was Zamboanga in the Philippines. I was instructed to fly up to this one particular channel on the south part of the island and drop bombs on it. After this period of where we had this St. Elmo's fire for about a half hour, and I began to approach the Zamboanga area we encountered enormous turbulence. It

was just horrible. The airplane was pitching and bucking and it got to the point where I just almost didn't have control. I was fighting it like crazy. My engines kept cutting out, then they would catch, and they would cut out. They would surge and the airplane would swing wide, back and forth. One of my bombs broke loose from the shackles and tore right out through the bomb bay. I finally got to the point where I didn't think I was going to be able to control it anymore. I told my navigator, his name was Murray. I said, "Murray, I am going to turn around if I can. I don't think I can hold this thing." I did a 180 and I got out of there. But I want to tell you that was one of the roughest, wildest encounters that I ever had in all my years of flying with atmosphere turbulence. I had to comment, I don't know if you watch public television, last night they had a program about that Air France jetliner that disappeared over the Atlantic.

*(End of tape side two.)*

Mr. Misenhimer

Go ahead about this airplane.

Mr. Fisher

As I was watching the program last night, it was just uncanny how similar the reports of the automatic navigation instruments gave to the Air France headquarters. These airbuses have computers that automatically send what's happening in the airplane, they send messages to the command center of Air France. That's all they ever had from the airplane. They found the wreckage over there afterwards. They had all of these distress messages that the computer sent to the command center. It was just uncanny how the things they were reporting that the airplane was going through was exactly what I went through that night when I was trying to fly up to Zamboanga. It was weird. The only difference is that I'm still here and the Captain that was flying that airplane is not.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got back to the field after that St. Elmo's fire, was there any damage to your plane?

Mr. Fisher

Yes. The engine magneto insulation. When I got back my engines ran okay but they missed quite a bit. When I got back and they inspected the engines they found the insulation on the coils in the magneto was like it had just been fried. There were bad wrinkles in the skin. I'm sure it was very close to my wings

being torn off. The skin of the aircraft was crinkled in several places. That was another airplane that they scrapped after I landed because it was so stressed in so many different places.

Mr. Misenhimer

Another thing that you mentioned in your write-up was one time you were looking for souvenirs with Infantry, what happened on that one?

Mr. Fisher

It was always a distressing thing to us aircrew that we fought a very tough and dangerous war but we never really had direct exposure to the enemy because we were in the air and they were on the ground or vice versa. We would envy our ground troops because when they would overrun the Japanese they would get all of these wonderful things like the battle flags their troops carried. I have two of them. I will have to send you a picture of them. We always envied that. So one day I was talking to one of my comrades who was also a pilot and another one who was a bombardier, Walter Waldron, and I said, "You know guys, we never get to have any souvenirs. Why don't we just go out to one of the Infantry outposts and see if we can go along with these guys and maybe find some souvenirs." The three of us got on a transport that was going up to Hollandia. At that time we were based in Nabzab in the Markham Valley. We flew up to Hollandia, which was one of the bases that MacArthur's troops had recently captured. There were three big airbases there. They had driven inland and captured these airbases and driven all the Japanese out into the jungle surrounding these airfields. The three of us flew up on this transport and landed. We looked around at the wrecks of the Japanese planes but we didn't find anything we really wanted. So we went to this Infantry outpost. There were six of these guys living in pup tents and they were guards right on the perimeter of where the Japanese forces were right on the outside. We asked them if they would go with us and we could walk out into the jungle on the other side of the line. They agreed to go with us, the six of them and the three of us from the Air Force. We went up the stream and of all things we ran into some Japanese. One of them went for his gun and we had to shoot him. The other two surrendered. We brought them back and turned them over to the prison control center. The two of them were so grateful because they thought we were going to kill them. They were so grateful when we did not kill them, each of them had this personal body flag. They carried them in under their shirts, wrapped around their bodies. Each of

them gave me their flag as a sort of symbol of gratitude for us bringing them out of the jungle and giving them their life. I still have those flags and I have some pictures of that trip. It was the Infantry and Walters and Walters and I was standing with them after we caught the Japanese and brought them back from the jungle. We were exhausted and covered with sweat, but all three of us were quite happy because we were able to get some fine souvenirs. I got a wallet from one of them and those two battle flags, and I treasure those.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were only three Japanese, right?

Mr. Fisher

There were three. They were Navy troops. They were all officers. They had made themselves a little hut. We were sort of ascending the side of a mountain, a streambed. You have to picture the situation. You were in this deep rainforest, with a kind of gloom under those giant trees all the time. Not much sunshine comes through. But we were under this tree there and then unexpectedly, boom, we ran into these three Japanese. They were standing out in front of their hut and one of them screamed. They had their rifles leaning against a tree and one of them ran for their rifle and grabbed it and swung it around and aimed it at us, we all pulled our .45s out and shot him. The other two threw their hands up. Then of course we were scared to death because we thought this noise from the shooting would bring other Japanese so we decided we had better get out of there. We took the two prisoners with us and went back down in a great hurry down this stream bed to the perimeter. When we got to where we had first hooked up with these Infantrymen, I took some pictures. I did get one picture, I think I still have it, of the Japanese that we shot. It was kind of interesting, I had a poor camera and as I told you, it was very gloomy in that rainforest. When he fell, of course I was shaking like you can't believe from fear, when he fell his body was laying on some rocks and a little shaft of light came through the trees. I very quickly took a picture of him and then we were running to get out of there. I think I still have it. If you would like copies of any of those, I will be glad to see if I can find them in my scrapbook. I also have pictures of those paratroopers that hit me that night at Leyte when I was hiding behind that cletrack and was almost killed by the explosion.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Fisher

It was just outstanding. We had a great outfit. Try to remember, we were all kids. You had to be something of an optimist to be a combat pilot. There was a very high mortality rate in combat pilots, particularly in the British when I flew with the RAF. I think 20% of the pilots were killed in training. It was just a combination of the fact that the British were just not all that great with mechanical things as well as the bad weather. Then of course, the U.S. had a similar record. I don't know if I can recall the exact statistics. I did some research on it several years ago because I wanted to write an essay about the Night Fighters. I might still have a copy of that. I called it "The Best." In order to create it, I did some research on how many pilots the U. S. trained during the war and what our casualties were. I compared the Night Fighters statistics with that of the Air Force as a whole. The Night Fighters were a superior brand of pilot but they had to be by definition. They flew at night. I wrote this essay which I called "The Best" and it was made a part of a book. We wrote a book about the 418<sup>th</sup> Night Fighter Squadron. My essay is published in that. I will send you a copy of that; it will have these statistics in it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I would like a copy of that.

Mr. Fisher

I will put it in the mail this afternoon.

Mr. Misenhimer

I have read somewhere I think that actually there were more pilots killed in training than there were in combat.

Mr. Fisher

That's not very far from the truth. There were an enormous number killed in training, particularly in the RAF. They had a very high training casualty rate. Throughout the war there were many, many pilots killed in training in the U. S. I don't know the exact statistics. I will look this information up on the web and I will get it to you. I'm going to have to go now, I'm getting weary.

Mr. Misenhimer

Thanks again for your time and for your service to our country.

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