

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center  
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

Robert D. Molleston  
Everett, Washington  
February 27, 2012  
Air Group 6  
Gunner SB2C  
*USS Hancock CV-19*

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is February the 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012. I am interviewing Mr. Robert D. Molleston by telephone. His phone number is 425-355-0419. His address is 520 112<sup>th</sup> Street, SW Apartment 333, Everett, Washington 98204. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Bob, 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. Thank you for that.

Mr. Molleston:

Thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum.

“Agreement Read.”

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Molleston:

That is okay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Molleston:

Yes, I do have.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Who would that be?

Mr. Molleston:

You're going to need the phone number or address, right?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Both of them, if you have them.

Mr. Molleston:

The contact would be to Robert M. Molleston. The address is 4223 192<sup>nd</sup> Place SW, Lynnwood, Washington 98036. The telephone for him is 206-372-6553.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hopefully we'll never use that, but you never know. Now, where were you born?

Mr. Molleston:

I was born in Lineville, Iowa, a little farm community in the southern part of Iowa right on the Iowa-Missouri line.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birth date?

Mr. Molleston:

I was born on May the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1924.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes, I had two brothers. I had an older brother and I had obviously a younger brother.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were either of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes. As a matter of fact, the whole family was in the service. My older brother went in the service in 1939 and made a career out of the Air Force, retired a Lieutenant Colonel and lives in San

Antonio. Myself, I was in the Navy. My younger brother went in the service 1945 and was only in for a year. My father was in the Coast Auxiliary. So, four out of the five in the family were in the service during World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are either of your brothers still living?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes, both of them are still living.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, I'd like to get their names and phone numbers and interview them.

Mr. Molleston:

Okay. Richard, the older brother, he is in a dementia place there in. I don't think he would be a good candidate. Is that what you're asking me, whether you can interview him or not?

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's my question, yes.

Mr. Molleston:

Even my younger brother is now in a full nursing facility, so I don't think either one of them would be a good candidate to do this.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's what I was wondering, it's too bad, but we'll accept that then. Did you have sisters?

Mr. Molleston:

No, just the three boys.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You grew up during the Depression, how did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Molleston:

Well, we lived in this little farming community in southern Iowa. The Depression didn't affect us too much simply because we all grew – families there all grew their own vegetables and their fruits and products like that. My dad was, by trade, a pharmacist. He had a drug store with a luncheon counter in it. He owned that for many years as I grew up and then he became a post master of this little town for probably fifteen years. That way they put clothes on our back, food on the table, shoes on our feet, gifts at Christmastime. We never felt the impact of the Depression.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was he farming also?

Mr. Molleston:

No, no. I should have said that even though we lived in a farming community, the town was probably 700 people or less, very, very small town.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you all have a garden?

Mr. Molleston:

Oh yes, we raised everything in the garden and then butchered in the fall or winter and my mother canned hundreds and hundreds of jars of vegetables and fruits.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You say you butchered. Did you raise some kind of pigs or what?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes, pigs. My grandparents, both of them, had a little herd of cows and they had chickens and they had pigs so they always supplied us with the meat during the winter months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you were pretty self-sufficient then?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes, but that's true of all the Midwest, which is the breadbasket of the nation, I guess. The war was far off, as far as we were concerned.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Molleston:

The little town there of Lineville and it was from grade one to grade twelve with no middle or junior high school or anything like that. It was a two-story building, and to this day, I can tell you where each room was and who each of my teachers were and I think there were probably less than 100 people in the entire school. In my graduating class I think there were 16. I was salutatorian of the graduating class. I think they might have given me an A- in Citizenship and I never did forgive them for that otherwise I would have been valedictorian. All those 16 people in my graduating class are gone except me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate, then?

Mr. Molleston:

1941.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you and how did you hear?

Mr. Molleston:

Well, it was on a Sunday morning and it was, of course, in the Midwest and it was probably after church and before we had our noon dinner. Of course, you know, in the Midwest you have three big

meals a day and not just lunch and dinner, it's supper, I guess, what they call it back there. We heard it on the news. I guess, at the time it didn't have much of an impact because we didn't know where Hawaii was or where Pearl Harbor was. We knew that we were at war so we were glued to the radio for the rest of the day and the next few days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you were 17 about then, right? You turned 17 in May.

Mr. Molleston:

Yes. I was just 17, you're right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go in to the service?

Mr. Molleston:

I went in the service – I had to dig this out, I got my DD 214 out to see when it exactly was - I went in on April the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1943. The number of years, months, days I served was 2 years, 11 months and 22 days. So that's approximately three years that I served.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do from the time you finished high school until you went into the service?

Mr. Molleston:

I got of high school in, I think, the first week of May in 1941. I was just 17, two weeks in to age 17. The first thing I did is I went in to Chicago, which was about 425 miles away, and I worked in a restaurant. That was short-lived because I got very homesick and I wanted to come home so after a couple, three months I came back home. Then I went to Biloxi, Mississippi where my older brother was stationed at Keesler Air Force Base. I found a job in the materiel civil service job out at Keesler Air Force Base and I worked there for about six months. Again, I hadn't got over my homesickness so I returned home. Then, the third experience I had – adventure that I had – after graduating high school was that I went to Kansas City, Missouri and I got a job with S.S. Kresge, the five-and-ten-

cent store. The Woolworth was one of them, S.S. Kresge was another one. I was the stock boy for S.S. Kresge. I think the pay was eighteen dollars a week, I think that's what it was. I had been there with a cousin, my cousin went to work for Montgomery Ward, and so we got our heads together and said, "Why don't we go enlist in the service?"

Both of us quit our jobs in Kansas City and returned back to our Iowa home. We decided that we wanted to get into the Navy. For whatever reason I don't know. We had the Mississippi River on one side of the state and the Missouri River on the other side of the state and anything in between was nothing more than a farmer's stock pond to water their cows and things. We chose the Navy. So we went to Des Moines and tried to enlist. He was accepted to the Navy and I was refused for medical reasons. I had a heart murmur and I had flat feet so they wouldn't let you go in to the Navy. So, my cousin went ahead in the Navy and finished out the war in the Merchant Marines. So, I went home very disappointed because I couldn't go in the service. I just laid around home for a couple of months and I said, "Hey, wait a minute, I'm going to go the draft board and I either want them to classify me as 4-F so I could get on with my life or I want them to put me on the next draft quota." I knew the people on the draft board and they got me right on the next draft. Again, I went to Des Moines to the recruiting station and I passed the physicals and the mental and all the medical provisions and all that stuff. They were getting ready to swear the group in. They called me out and said, "Molleston, it says here that you wanted to get in the Navy." I said, "Yes, but they turned me down because I had a heart murmur and I had had flat feet." He said, "You're perfectly physically able to go in the Navy if that's where you want to go." I said, "Yes, I'd like to go there." That's how I ended up in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fortunate.

Mr. Molleston:

(laughing)



Mr. Misenhimer:

So then what happened?

Mr. Molleston:

When I reported then for duty, I went to boot camp in Farragut, Idaho. Of course, Great Lakes is only 400 miles away and Farragut, Idaho was 1600 miles away or farther. Of course, we took the train out to Farragut, and Farragut was just being built at that time, the training station, I think it's called NTS, Naval Training Station, so I was there for the sixteen or eighteen weeks of boot camp and studied my Bluejackets' manual and learned how to be a sailor and all those things. Never once, of course every training station and Army base had the grinder or parade field. The grinder or parade field at Farragut was full of boulders about the size of an automobile. We never got on the grinder. We never had to do any marching, really. We never saw the lake. Farragut is on Lake Pend Oreille. Never saw the lake all the time I was there. Of course, part of your boot camp is you take an aptitude test to see what you're best suited for. They found out that I had some interest in becoming a radioman, so my next duty station was they sent to me to Millington, Tennessee which is just outside of Memphis, it's the Millington Naval Air Station, actually, it's the Navy Air Technical Training Center in Millington, Tennessee. We spent sixteen weeks, eighteen weeks, twenty weeks learning the Morse Code and everything, that radar, everything that you were supposed to know as a radioman. From there, from that station, then I was sent to Gulfport, Mississippi for gunnery school, aerial gunnery school. There we did our first flying there. Were flying in TBFs, which are torpedo bombers. That was where my first flight training started. The TBF was, at that time, was the largest carrier based aircraft that they had. It was a three-man job: the pilot, and then they had a ball-turret gunner which was an ordnance man, and then they had the radioman-gunner which was down in the tunnel. That was what I trained to do in that aerial gunnery down at Gulfport, Mississippi, not Gulfport, it's Hollywood, Florida. I'm getting mixed up here. From that duty station, after I'd learned how to become a radioman and after I'd been trained in aerial gunnery then I was sent to

Alameda, California where I joined CASU Six that's Carrier Air Service Unit. That means that you are on standby, when there are replacements to be had out in the South Pacific then they would send you out and join some other group out there. About that time, the Air Group Six was being recommissioned and Air Group Six was the only Air Group that was deployed at three different deployments in World War II. They were there aboard the *Enterprise* on December 7, 1941. After they deployed on the *Enterprise*, then they came back to rest and relaxation and then they went out again. They went on the *Intrepid*, *USS Intrepid* and did their duty there. So, they were being recommissioned then for a third deployment. I was assigned to Air Group Six from Alameda. We went up to Santa Rosa, California, which was about 75 miles north of San Francisco. There they brought the four squadrons together – the fighters, and the fighter-bombers, and the torpedo planes, and the dive-bombers. I was selected to join the dive-bombing group. See, the four squadrons, the fighter squadron was just the pilots and at that time they flew the F6F Hellcat. Then probably next there was the fighter-bombers and that is again, a one-man plane, the F4U Corsair. Both the fighters and the fighter-bombers, their mission was to escort the torpedo planes and the dive-bombers to their target. Then there was the torpedo squadron and that is a three-man deal. It was the pilot, the ball-turret gunner and then the radioman down in the tunnel. They flew the TBF or TBM depending upon who the builder was. The TBF which was built by Grumman. Then there were the dive-bombers, the SB2C.

SB2C and it's a two-man deal, the pilot and then the radioman gunner in the rear seat. The Helldiver, the SB2C Helldiver, was the replacement for the SBD, the workhorse of the Navy from 1941 up to probably 1943-44 as they introduced them to the new planes at that time. We were with them at Santa Rosa, I think that was in November and then we were shipped out to General Lyman Field on the Island of Hawaii to continue our training before we joined the fleet in the South Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me ask you a couple of questions here. That was November of '44 you went to Hawaii, right?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you go over there?

Mr. Molleston:

We went on ships. I called it a troop ship. I don't know what else to call it. I think it was called the *General E.T. Collins*. After we got aboard the ship, we found out that they only served two meals a day. They would only serve you breakfast and they would serve you dinner, you know. You've got a bunch of young people who want three meals a day, so some of the wiseguys decided to do something out of the order and get caught and get put on report and get Captains Mast and get punished for it. The punishment was usually you were sent to the kitchen where you'd get three meals a day. So, these guys - I didn't do that, but the others did. I assume it was about a five day trip, maybe longer then, because we were zig-zagging on the way to Hawaii. That's how we got over from San Francisco over to Hawaii – on the *General E.T. Collins*. I don't think that was a Navy ship. I think it was an Army transport.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you on Oahu, near Honolulu?

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No, this was on the island of Hawaii, this is near Hilo. Near Hilo, Hawaii. So then we trained there for a couple months, three months. Working together between the different squadrons, simulated targets, and they'd take us out and they'd drop dummy bombs and so on and so forth. In March, I don't know how we got from Hawaii out to Ulithi. Ulithi was the main staging area for the entire Pacific Fleet. I'm not exaggerating when I say to you that this must have been a natural harbor and we went to Ulithi and boarded the *Hancock* on March the 4<sup>th</sup>, I believe it was, or March the 9<sup>th</sup> of 1945. . You could literally walk from ship to ship, there were that many ships in that harbor. Not

hundreds but thousand of ships – from carriers to battleships to cruisers to destroyers to supply ships to oilers to many others. It was enough to take your breath away to see the might of the Navy all there in one place. So, we boarded the *Hancock*, *USS Hancock*.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is the CV number on it?

Mr. Molleston:

CV-19. I'll just mention to you that they numbered those aircraft carriers on when they were built, so when they laid the keel, it was supposed to be the keel for the *Ticonderoga* and John Hancock Insurance Company came along and said, "Uncle Sam, if you let us build that carrier and you let us pay for that, if you'll put our name on it." So, the *Ticonderoga* became then the *USS Hancock*. So that was in 1943 that they built that. Then I suppose the next one, number 20, would have been the *Ticonderoga*. That's how we ended up as the *Essex*-class carrier CV-19.

We boarded the *Hancock* in the early part of March, the 4<sup>th</sup> or the 9<sup>th</sup> whatever it was, and almost immediately, that was the time of the kamikazes. Every night at dusk, just as it was getting dark, here come the kamikazes. All the ships in Ulithi and in the harbor would go to General Quarters. You couldn't see these planes, the Japanese planes come in, but they either using radar or what. The only way we could see them coming in is the exhaust from their engines. We would stand there and it was like a show. You're sitting there and watching these planes come in and every ship in the moorage is firing on them and everything. You couldn't see them so you're just firing where you thought they were going to be. That continued every night – that the kamikazes would come in – and it wasn't then until I think March the 22 that we finally left Ulithi and started out bombing in the South Pacific and hitting targets out there.

That was March. I said we went out March the 23<sup>rd</sup> and we supported the invasion of Okinawa which was actually April the 1<sup>st</sup>. I have – I kept a diary in my flight log of that. Could I read that? Would you be interested in hearing that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

That would be fine, go ahead.

Mr. Molleston:

This is the diary from my flight log book that I maintained and it's dated March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1945 –  
Boarded *USS Hancock*, CV-19.

March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1945 – in Ulithi.

From March 11, 1945 – two Jap planes made suicide dives on the *USS Randolph* and hit her on the stern. The planes were picked up at 61 miles at 4,000 feet. The *Randolph* was anchored about 2,000 yards off our port quarter. We saw the plane hit as if we were attending the movie on the hangar deck.

From March 12<sup>th</sup> - at 0930 another Jap plane flew over but was chased off before he could drop a bomb. It was my first G.Q. and I was scared.

Then we go to March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1945 – the group made a pass on island of Kyusho. Target was A&R shops at Kagoshima. The damage slight. We lost 6 SB2Cs, ran out of gas. Now Mallon, Schneider, Cox, and Jakebec were rescued, we lost Jenson and Cole.

On the 19<sup>th</sup>, we struck at Kobe, a Japanese city. One CVL one CV-6 Afs. We lost two SB2Cs hit by AA over target. Smith was picked up by a submarine. Gordon bailed out over target. *USS Franklin* was hit by a thousand pound bomb dropped by a Judy after of the island. Over 1200 killed. They abandoned ship but it was later taken in tow by the *USS Pittsburgh*. A.G. Commander Miller shot down the Judy.

On March the 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945 – fighter cover for the *USS Franklin*. Attack started about 1500 and lasted until 2000. One suicide over us, shot down 400 airplanes, missed us, hit a BD alongside who was refueling too close. Went topside to watch show. Judy hit the *Enterprise* with minor damage. Shot down by a destroyer. Judy missed us with two bombs by 50 feet. One Zeke and one Jill made attack on us. F6F show down the Zeke, *Hancock* show down the Jill. F6F was shot down also.

Made good water landing. Bettys raided us that night and reopened up the 5-inchers. The Bettys left. We missed shooting down there during the day and show down three after this. After this I'm going below deck. Sho, this is really getting rough. The report came from Admiral that we sank BD a CVL or CV and 3 Aks. Destroyed 470 planes on raid to Kyushu. Still no raid or plans for us. Here's where I first began making flights over a target.

This is March the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1945 – made first strike on Okinawa. Took off at 1400, overcast at 2000 feet, could not make a pass but came in visual distance of target. The tank ran dry and we dropped down into the overcast and almost became lost. Saw no planes or ships, made good landing on return to carrier. Dropped by radar missed the whole island.

March the 24<sup>th</sup> – took off 1400 for second strike on Sakishima, south of Okinawa, overcast ceiling of 2000 feet, dropped by radar, hit island, battleships at Okinawa, made poor landing on the return. See, I was judging my pilot on his landings. Made poor landing on return to carrier. Fighters pretty well shot up. I won't read the rest of it. Then we started hitting the Japanese homeland.

We supported the invasion of Okinawa there on April the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1945 – take off at 0600, air support for invasion of Okinawa. Troops went ashore at 0900. One hundred thousand men, one thousand planes. We bombed ridge with two five-hundred pound bombs, dropped two one hundred-and-sixty pound bombs on the pillbox. England, a shipmate, went into the drink. He was picked up picket ship. No strafing. We rode out the storm.

April 3<sup>rd</sup> – take off at 1315, hit IE Jima north of Okinawa, target was the city. Dropped two five-hundred pound bomb and two 250-pound bombs. Demolished city. Got a lot of strafing in. Japs dug trenches in airfield. Saw Zeke on the ground. We set fire to thatched hut. Bogeys everywhere 30 clicks north of Okinawa. Five splashed. Invasion proved successful so far.

I should tell you about my first experience on Okinawa. We had dropped our bombs on Naha, I think that was the capital of Okinawa, and that was where Ernie Pyle was killed, the famous writer about the war. So we had dropped our bombs and we were making a strafing run strafing and I saw

a white horse running down the road and I strafed the white horse, I'm sorry to say. I think the adrenaline had kicked in and I was willing to shoot anything that moved down on the ground. That was my first combat experience at shooting a horse.

April the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945 - It says all planes took off to sink Japanese fleet. Our planes didn't see it, it was sunk by other carriers. At 1210 General Quarters was sounded, then by 1215 the *Hancock* took a bomb hit by a suicide dive. I was below decks. The bomb hit at port and aft of forward elevator.

Bomb hit port and aft of forward elevator, hit \_\_\_\_\_ and went over the starboard side. Fires on flight deck and hangar deck. Bomb exploded between hangar deck and flight deck above 40mm mount. Fires were under control in an hour. Many went over the side. Death toll 26 with many missing. Only air group missing was Estes and Starba. Saulman was badly burned.

April the 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945, dead were buried at 1300. Ship is returning to Ulithi for repair along with *USS Cabot* and two other D.D. Maybe I'll get a little rest now.

April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1945 – arrived Ulithi, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1945 at 1430. No more ships here. Commadore came aboard, surveyed damage, can't be fixed here.

April the 12<sup>th</sup> – left at 1000 for beer party on MogMog Island. Had air raid, got second-class mail.

April the 13<sup>th</sup>, Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> – left Ulithi for Pearl Harbor.

April 21<sup>st</sup> – Arrived Pearl Harbor. Had ten days rest at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. They completely removed the bow of the *USS Hancock* and completely reinstalled a new bow on there in ten days.

They made that whole repair in ten days. From April 21<sup>st</sup> when we arrived at Pearl Harbor and then

on May 1<sup>st</sup> – Arrived at Barbers Point for training. We went back to training again. Barbers Point would have been on the island of Oahu.

On June 6<sup>th</sup> – we boarded the *USS Hancock* for a week's shakedown cruise.

June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1945 – left Ford Island for combat.

June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1945 – take off at 0445, made six strikes on Wake Island. Target was water supply, food, etc. All good drops. Heavy anti-aircraft, no planes lost.

I won't read this, but we went to the Philippines. Then we left Leyte Gulf in the Philippines on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1945 and then we started hitting the Japanese homeland on July the 10<sup>th</sup>. Hit Hokaido and different islands there. Then we go right up to August the 9<sup>th</sup>, when we continued to hit the home islands. On August the 9<sup>th</sup> is when we were shot down, my pilot and I, on a mission. I had been asked maybe twenty years ago or longer, a destroyer, the *USS Harrison*, the DD-573, picked us up in the ocean and about twenty years ago the historian of the *USS Harrison* asked if I would write of my experience of being picked up the *Harrison*, and I'd like to read that to you because it tells you how we were shot down and how we were rescued.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go ahead and read that, yes.

Mr. Molleston:

This was written because it was requested by the *Harrison*. I labeled this "9 August of 1945", by Robert D. Molleston, Aviation Radioman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class.

The call to flight orders came on the morning of 9 August 1945. It was the day a second atom bomb was being dropped on Japan, this one on Nagasaki, and six days before the unconditional surrender of the combined armed forces of the Empire of Japan to the United States and its allies ending World War II. I was a twenty-one-year old airman in the rear seat of a SB2C Helldiver dive-bomber. My pilot was Lieutenant John "Jack" Freeman, Jr. We were assigned to Air Group Six and flying from the deck of the *Essex*-class carrier *USS Hancock*, CV-19, in Task Group 38, flight one, a giant armada of Navy ships less than one hundred miles off the coast of the Japanese homeland. On the morning of 9 August, together with twelve other bombing squadrons 6 SB2Cs, our mission and primary bombing target was an airfield on the Japanese home island of Honshu. Twenty-five five - hundred pound bombs were dropped on selected targets of hangars, planes and runways. All our aircraft returned safely to our carrier base after the 3.8 hour flight. For the afternoon launch of aircraft, Jack and I were standing ready when one of the other assigned Helldivers developed engine



or radio problems and was scrapped. Jack and I joined nine other 6 bombers in an attack on Matsushima airfield in northern Honshu. After arriving over the target area, we commenced our high-speed bombing run at 12,000 feet and Jack moved the Helldiver into a seventy-degree dive at \_\_\_\_\_ thousand feet. After successfully releasing our bombs over the target, we headed seaward to the designated recovery area. As we were pulling out of our dive, two bursts of anti-aircraft fire hit our plane with a \_\_\_\_\_. I felt a piercing pain as shrapnel entered my right leg and foot. Jack and I were able to communicate with one another for a brief moment before our ICS went out, but long enough for him to know I was wounded and for me to know that he was fighting the controls to keep the aircraft in the air. We attempted to get as far away from the enemy coastline as possible and as close to the Tomcat destroyers and the task force as we could before making a crash water landing. A friendly F4U Corsair from Air Group 6 became our protective guardian from enemy planes as limped towards the task group. Jack was using all his flying skills to keep the aircraft in the air and I was jettisoning anything I could from the rear cockpit to lighten the load. I made an unsuccessful attempt to unfasten the twin .30 caliber guns from the mounting to throw them over the side, but lacked the strength. The thought of the guns coming loose in the water landing and smashing into the back of my head haunted me. Jack kept the SB2C Helldiver flying as long as he could before time and altitude became our adversary. We were barely skimming the waves. After the initial impact as the aircraft hit the water, I scrambled out of the rear seat to see if Jack was all right. He had bumped his head in the crash landing and was dizzy but not injured. Together we pulled the two-man rubber life raft from the compartment as the aircraft sank beneath us. We inflated the life raft and Jack pulled me in. The saltwater eased the pain that surged through my leg and in my foot. It seemed an interminable period of time drifting in the life raft in enemy waters, Jack and I sensed rather than saw an object approaching. One of the Tomcat destroyers, the *USS Harrison*, DD-573, had been vectored to rescue us. The crew threw a rope cargo net over her side to facilitate getting us aboard. When they observed that I had been wounded and

would be unable to climb the cargo net, two sailors from the *Harrison* either jumped into the water to assist me or climbed down the cargo net and carried me aboard. The ship's medical officer, Lieutenant Riederer attended my wounds and doctored both of us until we were transferred back to the *Hancock* the following morning. It was accepted practice that a rescued airman give up his .38 caliber gun and other flight gear to the souvenir hunters as retribution for being rescued. Lt. Riederer made a similar request of me, but I refused to give him my gun. What did I know about protocol? However, the *Hancock* sent several gallons of ice cream to the officers and men of the *USS Harrison* in exchange for Jack and me. The following morning, Jack made the transfer from the *Harrison* to the *Hancock* on the breeches buoy. I was strapped in a wire basket and was pulled across, coming dangerously close to getting dunked. I chose to remain with the air group aboard the *Hancock* rather than be transferred to a hospital ship. It would give me a better chance at getting back to the Sates sooner. Air Group Six was decommissioned in San Pedro Harbor on October 1945. I spent the next nine months in naval hospitals and in rehabilitation recovering from my wounds until the Navy discharged me in June of 1946. History has recorded that the *USS Harrison*, DD-573, participated in the search and rescue of 13 downed airman, 11 pilots and 2 air crewman. Jack and I are two of the five living rescued survivors. End of the story.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's good, good story.

Mr. Molleston:

A division in Bomber Squadron Six had four planes. The leader, the wingman, the slot man. Of the eight people in that division, there are only three of us left. Tom Maloney who lives in McMinnville, Oregon, the leader and he has more medals than you can shake a stick at, a couple Navy crosses, I don't know how many Distinguished Flying Crosses and probably a dozen air medals. He's very well be-medaled. Anyway, Tom Malony was the leader and there is my pilot Jack Freeman who still lives back in Pennsylvania, and I talk to him maybe once a month and hope

to keep in touch with one another, and myself. So there's just the three of them in the division that are still alive. That's probably pretty unusual.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened?

Mr. Molleston:

You know, time we went into combat and day-to-day operations. It became, after the war was over, we didn't keep in touch with one another. We went home to our different homes and started our lives up again and most of us went to college and married or back to our jobs, whatever the case may be. That was in 1946 that I got out of service. One night in 1990, late at night, like at 10:30 my time, I got a telephone call and the voice at the other end of the call said, "Is your name Bob Molleston?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you serve in the Navy in World War II?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Were you in Air Group Six?" I said, "Yes." What it was, it was the son of one of the officers that served on the *USS Harrison* and he was kind of the historian of their *Harrison* Association and he was following up on these 13 people that the *Harrison* had rescued during World War II. I expected any minute he was going to ask me, "Please send \$25 and we'll do this for you," or "send \$50 and ...". Anyway, in the conversation he said, "Do you know where your pilot is?" And I said, "No." He said, "Do you know what to know where he is?" I said, "Well yes I would." So he told me that he had been in touch with Jack Freeman, my pilot, and where he lived and gave me his phone number and strongly suggested that perhaps I should call him. Maybe Jack was trying to find me at the same time, too, I don't know. Anyway, a few days later, again thinking it was all a hoax, a few days after thinking it all over, I did call Jack so we established our relationship with one another and that was in – so he talked me, Jack talked me into joining the *USS Hancock* Appreciation. The Air Group wasn't big enough to have its own reunions and associations, so they joined with the *Hancock* and that's how we became associated with the *Hancock* Association. Eventually I talked to Jack at least once a month.

I know what I wanted to say, when we had a reunion back at Virginia Beach, Virginia, this fellow that called me that night, the son of an officer on the *Harrison*. He worked at the Post Office or someplace, anyway, he drove overnight from Pennsylvania down to Virginia to see Jack and I and to establish a relationship with us. I still hear from this historian, who is a much younger guy, probably be in his 50s now, it was 20 years ago. Speaking of the *Hancock* Association, Jack got me involved in it. Four years after I became a member of the *Hancock* Association, they had the reunion in Seattle, Washington. I was on the committee, the organizing committee and the planning committee, and became a member of the board. Lo and behold, the next thing I knew, the people who were in charge died or were dying and for whatever reason and I found myself President of the *USS Hancock* Association 1996 to 1998 and we had a membership about that time of a thousand members, of which maybe 15 or 30 were from Air Group Six and most of them were from the ship's company, from the *Hancock*. I served two years as President of the *Hancock* Association and became very well known to the people of the *Hancock*. I no longer attended their reunion simply because my wife wouldn't fly after 9/11 and so we never attended anything after 2001. They still have the reunions every two years, I'm still on the board, but I don't take an active part in the reunions anymore.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've got some questions for you here. How many total missions did you fly?

Mr. Molleston:

I think there were 17 missions. Seventeen missions from March the 23<sup>rd</sup> until I was wounded on August the 9<sup>th</sup> then we came back, to San Pedro, California. I might add that they always talk about getting a Zero and all that stuff that goes to World War II. As far as I'm concerned, if anybody, *anybody*, has ever flew, took off and landed, on an aircraft carrier is a hero. It's the most terrifying and satisfying experience a person could ever have. To be flying around with miles and miles, thousand of miles, of water around you, find that little postage stamp down there that you're

supposed to land this plane on, and it's just amazing how they did that and how it all worked. In a launch, they always launch the fighters first, the F6Fs and then the F4Us and then the torpedo planes and then the bombers simply because they were heavier because they were carrying armament. We would be the last that would be taking off. We were only catapulted twice, and I don't know why we were catapulted. In those days, they didn't have steam catapults. I don't know what the mechanism was, but it kind of threw you in the air. Today, I think maybe all the planes are catapulted today off of carriers. I only had two catapults. But I guess the time I remember and I don't know why I would have ever been allowed up on the bridge of the carrier when they were landing aircraft, but I was up there in some capacity, I have no idea what it was, but it's amazing to see the choreography of these planes landing. When they are downwind and when they are in the groove and you've got this landing signal officer at the stern of the carrier with his paddles helping you get your aircraft down on the deck. The planes land every fifteen seconds, and that is just amazing to have those things land, unhook the tailhook from the cables and have the pilots taxi up above the other cables. It's just amazing how well done and how dangerous it is – not only for the pilots and the crewmen but also for the deckhands, the ones in different colored uniforms that denote what their duties were. Amazing. I only had one experience of hitting the barrier. On an aircraft carrier there are a series of cables that extended up off of the flight deck, and as your plane came in the tail hook caught the cable and that stopped the aircraft, quite suddenly incidentally, but it stopped the aircraft. If you missed those cables, and there were a number of them before you'd be up to mid-ship, then they had the barriers, which were vertical cables with the idea that your prop would become entangled in the barriers and that would stop your forward motion. The barriers were there to protect the planes that were still up in front. If you missed the cables and didn't have the barriers, then you would just plow into all of these aircraft that were parked up in the bow of the carrier. This was on the *USS Ranger* when we were in training at Santa Rosa and my pilot, I think it was Jack Freeman at the time, we missed the cables on the *USS Ranger* and we hit the barrier and we stopped,

obviously. I still have the medical slip that I got from the doctor from the *USS Ranger* that says “relieved from duty for two days for contusions\_of the ankle.” So, I didn’t know what the word “contusions” meant except that I could prove that I had been hit on the ankle. Why the ankle, I don’t have any idea. That was the only time we ever hit the barrier. So, we’d see planes come in, hitting cables, and missing both cables and barriers, and plowing into planes. If an aircraft came in and the radio didn’t work, they dented the side of it, they would just shove it over the side. They wouldn’t bother to repair it or take anything out of it or anything like that. Just shove it over the side. They had more replacements planes coming all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you start out flying the TBM or TBF then switch to the SB2C later or what?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes. I took my training in the TBF down in Miami, Hollywood area. When I got into Air Group 6, I didn’t know if I had a choice or whether I was just automatically put in dive-bombing, I don’t know how I ended up there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On the *Hancock*, were you in dive-bombers all the time?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes. All the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On the *Hancock* all the time on the SB2C.

Mr. Molleston:

When I first started flying down in Hollywood, Florida, I flew in the TBF and I was down in the tunnel and all these engine fumes come back through the tunnel, and I was so sick, I was never so sick in all my life. I would have dry heaves and that went on for weeks and weeks. There is nothing

worse than being airsick but I finally conquered it and was able to stand all the fumes that came back through the tunnel there. But I will never forget how sick I was when I first got in the Navy planes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How serious was your wound you got?

Mr. Molleston:

Well, they cut off about half of my – from my right leg – about half of my right heel and then I had shrapnel all up and down the calf of the leg. Some of the shrapnel embedded into the bone, whatever the medical term is for that. I had a series of operations when I came back to the States, like six months after I came back. I was in the Naval Hospital in Seattle, Washington, and that's where most of my surgery was done, and then the rehabilitation was done there, as well. I had pieces of shrapnel come out of my leg for probably the next ten years. Little pieces would work out of my leg. I still have shrapnel in the bone. It doesn't bother me, but in x-rays it stills shows it's embedded in the bone there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you lose part of your leg or your foot?

Mr. Molleston:

No. Just a portion of the heel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you get a disability for that?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes, just a 10% disability.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date was your ship hit by that bomb?

Mr. Molleston:

April the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I have several questions for you here. When you went over to Hawaii on the ship, were you in a convoy or did you go by yourself?

Mr. Molleston:

I don't remember. All I remember is the *E.T. Collins*, and I'm sure it had to be in a convoy of some kind.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Molleston:

No. Heard about her, but we never did, no. We were, I'm sorry to say, but the Air Group that served aboard an aircraft carrier kind of were considered to be an elite, I'm sorry to say. I don't think I ever made an acquaintance with any of the so called ship's company of the *Hancock*. Not until later when I became President of the association. We didn't pull any duties – guard duty or any storm watches or anything like that – we were just treated royally. We ate good. We had our own separate quarters. Speaking of separate quarters, when we boarded the *Hancock* in Ulithi in 1945, March, this was all a new adventure for us. We didn't realize the danger that we were involved in at all. As these kamikazes would come in at dusk and we'd sit and watch the exhaust from these different planes and different bombers and things. We would all be there cheering them like you would on a Friday night. Every ship in the harbor would be firing at them and we would just be there on the sidelines, so to speak, on the hangar deck cheering for all these ships hoping they would hit this plane that was coming in. When one would hit and would burst into flames, you'd hear the darndest roar go up from this group. Ship's company was manning the guns, so we would cheer when one go down and we would groan when they would miss one. Some of the things that I mentioned in my memoir, some planes crashed just before they hit the deck of the carrier itself. A plane would sneak in and the anti-aircraft would hit the Japanese plane, then we would all run into a



corner. We would all run into a corner and pile on top of each other to protect ourselves. Like rattlesnakes do in the wintertime. Don't they bundle all together in a big bundle? Finally the operations officer of the air group or somebody discovered how that dangerous that was for the air group to be up there cheering - I'm speaking of the enlisted people, I'm not speaking of the officers - to be cheering and how vulnerable we were. If a bomb had hit us and destroyed everyone of us, the air group couldn't exist. They'd have to go back and resupply some place. They finally got smart and we would - you had the flight deck and then you had the hangar deck, and we were the first deck below the hangar deck, I suppose for the purpose for manning our planes quicker in an emergency - after they decided they needed to protect the aircrew, they moved us down about four decks down in the interior of the *Hancock*. No more cheering up there and they told us to stay off of there because we could get killed.

Something I would like to interject here, it might be of interested, when I first started flying down in Hollywood, Florida, in the training part of it, I finally realized that flying was a serious business and you could get killed. I became very aware of that. Not before. Before, I thought, "Aw gee, I'm young, I'm 19, I'm invulnerable, nothing will ever happen to me." It was an adventure so to speak, and I finally realized that yes, somebody could get hurt, somebody could get killed. I made the vow, a promise to myself, I said, "God," I said, "if you get me through this war," I said, "I'll promise that I will spread Your word. I will become a minister." I really meant that vow. I lived by that vow all the time I was in combat. I always carried a small Testament in my flight suit. After the war was over, I was in the hospital in Seattle and my parents lived in a town about twenty-five miles north of Seattle so I could visit them on weekends or something like that. One time I was visiting my parents and this was a town of about 35,000/40,000 with numerous, numerous churches. You know churches of different denominations they have their conferences or committees or whatever you want to call them. You've got the Catholics and the Presbyterians and the Methodists and so on and

so forth. There's usually one spokesman for that particular group of ministers or Fathers or whatever they are. One time I was visiting my parents there in this town and I sought out this spokesman for this group of ministers and I said, "I'd like to come and talk to you." So, it happened to be a Presbyterian. He was the spokesman for the group, a Presbyterian minister. I told him my story, that I was afraid that I was going to get killed and I asked God for his protection during this period of combat and my time in service and promised that if he would protect me that I would spread His word. I told him the whole story and I bared myself to him. He looked at me for a little while and he said – he probably called me Robert – he said, "Robert," he said, "I don't think you're ready. I don't think God would hold you to that vow that you made, maybe under duress or for whatever reason you made it." He said, "I don't think you should become a minister." I, obviously, was shaken. I didn't know why he would say something like that. He said, "You shouldn't become a minister until you've had the calling. You did this under duress and you should wait for a calling." He said, "If it was meant for you to be a minister then you'll get that calling." So I went away from that meeting very, very disappointed because my heart and mind were set on becoming a minister when I got out of the service. To this day, I haven't had the calling, but it's always been in the back of my mind that maybe the time isn't here yet. So, I thought that was kind of an interesting story. It is my feelings and my religious background. I'm a Christian, I go to church, and my wife was Catholic. She passed away a few months ago, but I was baptized and raised in the Methodist group and so I've been attending – where we live, in a retirement home and we have Catholic mass every Monday for the residents of the home and I've been attending masses here. I'm looking for a church and I'll find it. I attended the Methodist church this past weekend and next Sunday I'm going to be at a non-denominational group.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's an interesting story.

Mr. Molleston:

I've got another story to tell you. When we were shot down and I was wounded and we were transferred from the *Harrison* back to the *Hancock* and of course I was in sick bay. Sick bay aboard a carrier is like a medium-sized hospital, I mean they can do anything and everything for you, but I was in the hospital and the very first night that I was there, and this is when I get very emotional and I get choked up – there are two instances and I'll relate another one – I get very emotional when I say this. The first night that I'd been back aboard the carrier and I was in sick bay, my pilot Jack Freeman came down to see me and the first thing he said was, "Bob, I'm sorry. I'm sorry this happened. I'm sorry we were shot down." I was so shocked and I told him that he had no reason to apologize, that what happened is what happened. It was destiny. I said, "You got us back and what was the most important thing." So, we hugged each other at that time. That's very emotional to me to this very day.

Another emotional time, about the same incident, is when we were transferred from the *Harrison* back to the carrier. As I was going across on the line on the wicker basket, the wire basket, and I looked up on the hangar deck of the *Hancock*, and there were all my buddies standing there welcoming me aboard and that meant so much to me that they would come down there. I think I was the only one in the air group, in fact I know I was the only one in the air group, that got injured. I'm the only one of the sea air group, that got a Purple Heart from that air group. I'm proud of it, but my shipmates were standing there welcoming me back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's quite a story. What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Molleston:

2<sup>nd</sup> Class Petty Officer – ARM 2C, Second Class.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Molleston:

I think that we all felt that we had a job to do and we were going to do it. We would all do the job we were trained to do, and I think morale was good aboard ship. You can't get in any trouble, aboard ship (laughing). You can't go out to a tavern or a bar or anything like that. The morale was good, never any question.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home with any souvenirs from World War II?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes. When I was in sick bay aboard the *Hancock*. When was the war over, August the 15<sup>th</sup>, I think it was, the signing was September 2<sup>nd</sup>. So, the *Hancock* was in Japanese waters all this time, and I think it was the Yokosuka, that's the big Japanese Navy base, and I think we docked there and they gave the crew, meaning the whole ship crew and air group, they could go ashore. Some of my buddies brought me back souvenirs and I somehow got ashore in Yokosuka with crutches or whatever it was and wherever it was, it wasn't a big Navy base, it was a little town or a little village and we would be walking down Main Street of the little village. As we would walk by, you could see the Japanese people and see the doors and windows closing of whatever buildings were along the streets. The people were actually afraid of us. I don't know whether that was the propaganda that the Japanese government showed or what, that they would all be raped or killed or whatever the case may be. I ended up, souvenirs, with my .38 caliber Smith & Wesson gun, which we always carried. I got home with that along with the cartridge belt with the bullets in it. I put it away in a storage trunk and never looked at it for forty years. I went back to look at it and the bullets were all corroded. The corrosions had gone out in the leather of the holster of the gun. I had a son-in-law who was in law enforcement and I showed him the gun. He said, "Bob, don't fire that gun because it will blow up in your hand." So, I've never owned a gun in my life, not even a .22 rifle, not anything. So, then my granddaughter married a young man who was a gunsmith. He offered to take the .38

souvenir that I had and check it out and make it work. Well, anyway, the timing was off was the only thing that was wrong with it. He repaired it and brought it up to where it worked. I had ammunition and I gave it to my youngest son and he has it now as a souvenir. Every souvenir that I ended up with, of all things, is a doll – a Japanese doll. It's, what do you call a Japanese warrior?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Samurai.

Mr. Molleston:

He's sitting on a throne and it's about twelve inches high, it's porcelain and it is in all the colors, all the garb on. Warlord, that's the word I was thinking of. He's a Japanese warlord. I brought that home. I brought home an onion skin that I got ashore. It looks like an order of some kind and it's written all in Japanese and there's about twenty pages and it looked to me like it was a work order for something. I don't have any idea where I got it, but I got it on that trip ashore. I've been looking for sixty-five years for a Japanese to interpret that (laughing), but I haven't found a Japanese yet. It's ironic because where we live, where I live at the retirement home and there is a Japanese living here who was relocated from Washington to Idaho, I think Idaho relocation camp, and she could read it for me, but I'm afraid of bringing up any past memories that she might have.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Molleston:

No. We were in combat so there was no opportunity to do that unless you're talking about training in Memphis.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anywhere.

Mr. Molleston:

In Memphis, when I was in radio school, the two that I ever remember, we used to have I would call

a Tea Dance, like a Saturday afternoon at three o'clock or four o'clock in the afternoon. They didn't serve tea, but that's what I always called it. They would put that on and they brought their bands there and I suppose they brought their girls in from town or whatever with the band. Those were the two celebrities that I ever saw: Clyde McCoy and Henry Busse.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes when we were transporting across country from Memphis to Hollywood, Florida on the old L&N Railroad where they had the lamps still hanging in the middle, kerosene lamps hanging in the middle of the coach then traveling from my hometown in Iowa to Farragut, Idaho stopping in stations in Montana and different places, the Red Cross would meet us there with doughnuts and we'd lean out the car windows and they would give us doughnuts and pastries.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes, yes. We did. Yes, we did cross the equator, but we didn't go through the initiation for whatever reason.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you didn't do that, then.

Mr. Molleston:

No, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Molleston:

I would have to be honest with you: every time I took off and landed from the aircraft carrier (laughing). That's a frightening experience. I don't think I was frightened much when I was wounded because we'd been trained to do that and it all came automatic, like when the aircraft hit the water, I didn't have to think: "now I have to unfasten my seatbelt, I need to do this, I need to do that, I need to go up and get the life raft..." it was all automatic because you had gone through that so many times training exactly what to do and when to do it and how to do it and things like that. I guess I would say the most frightening moment that I had in combat was as you come in, you're flying at 12/13,000 feet, just low enough that you don't need oxygen, and then you approach your target and you get your high speed run by putting the nose over and building up your speed and then push over into the dive about 10,000 feet. I'm facing backwards, I'm going down on my back and you look at the altimeter and it's going around like I don't know what and your thought is, "Is he going to pull out in time? Is he alive? Is he able to pull out in time?" To pull out of the dive, and down around 3,000 feet and that's about pretty close to where he's going to launch his bombs. Look at the altimeter and get on the intercom and remind him to pull out. That moment is the most frightening time, when you pull out of that dive, whether you're going to pull out of it safely or whether you're going to go straight in the ground. There's nothing you could do about, you couldn't bail out at that time. That would have to be my most terrifying and frightening time, the times that we pulled out of a dive.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Molleston:

Well, of course I got the Purple Heart. I got the Air Medal with two gold stars in lieu of additional. I could have- I was not medal happy, so to speak. All my brothers applied for and received the Distinguished Flying Cross. I didn't do that because I didn't need any more medals, it wasn't going to change the way I lived or how I feel. I never applied for the Distinguished Flying Cross. I got the

Purple Heart. I got the Air Medal and then the five or six other ribbons, whatever they meant. I never did know what they meant. I got some.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about battle stars. How many battle stars?

Mr. Molleston:

I think there was seven battle stars. Five to seven. Probably five battle stars.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your GI Bill for anything when you got out?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes, I did. My parents had left Iowa and moved to Washington during the war years, from the time I left home. They sent me to Minneapolis and then I was discharged in Des Moines, Iowa because that's where I enlisted. Then I went on down to my old hometown and I stayed with friends. I met a buddy there and we decided well we'll go to school together. He said, "What's your choice?" I said, "I'd like to go to the University of Illinois in Champaign." He said, "Well, I'd like to go to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois," which was Chicago. So we couldn't make up our minds; neither one of us would give in. So we finally said, "Let's flip a coin to see whether we go to Illinois or we go to Northwestern." So we flipped a coin and he won and we went to Northwestern University. We enrolled in Northwestern University in the field of education, I was going to be a school teacher. I went two years there and in between my sophomore and junior year I came west during the summer vacation to visit my parents and I became ill with some problems and I never went back to Northwestern. I ended up at the local university here called Western Washington University so that's where I got my degree there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Molleston:



No, I don't think so. The transition was all very well. I went to this little town in Iowa, my parents and no family there anymore, and I think they had what they called the 52-20 Club.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The 52-20 Club, that was unemployment.

Mr. Molleston:

Yeah, basically what it was. Fifty-two weeks at \$20 a week. I think it was supposed to be something to help. We built chicsales (outhouses), I think, but I don't know what for, state parks, I don't have any idea what they were for.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On April the 12<sup>th</sup>, 1945, President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Molleston:

Yes. we were aboard ship and it was just another day. We were probably on our way back to Pearl Harbor from the carrier when we heard that. Yeah, we heard it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What reaction did people have when they heard that?

Mr. Molleston:

I just don't recall because it was when were busy and we didn't know who Truman was and what was going to happen from then on out. In August they gave us, I think there were five targets that we were not to violate, not to bomb. Nobody knew why. Many times, our targets were covered with clouds and weather conditions or whatever. So then our targets became unavailable, we could go to targets of opportunity. Just those five and they drummed that in to our minds, "Do not go to these towns." As it turned out, one of them was Hiroshima and the other was Nagasaki and that is where the atom bomb was dropped that a week later and then the second one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August 6<sup>th</sup> was the first one.

Mr. Molleston:

Then they went on Nagasaki. Those were what those targets were out of bounds for us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On May the 8<sup>th</sup> of '45 when Germany surrendered, did you all have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Molleston:

No. Our war was in the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you didn't do anything when that happened.

Mr. Molleston:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On August the 15<sup>th</sup> when they announced Japan surrendered, any kind of a celebration then? Of course, you were in the hospital.

Mr. Molleston:

I was in the sick bay. The planes were on a mission and it came over the air that all flights were to return to base immediately and they said that Japan had surrendered. I guess all hell broke loose.

They shot their guns and they did barrel rolls and loop-the-loops and finally got some discipline and got them all back together, but it was a quite of celebration. It was all done at probably 10,000 feet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Molleston:

I have, in 2009 I was a guest of honor of Honor Flight, perhaps you've heard of that organization.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, I'm familiar with it, yes.

Mr. Molleston:

I was one of their honored guests in 2009 and when I got home, I was so impressed with it and I wanted to keep that memory forever and, again, if you don't then you forget about it or leave out the important things. I kept a diary. I would like to read to you what I wrote down after that trip that I took.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sure, great. Go ahead.

Mr. Molleston:

It's called "Tour of Honor." Underneath that, I call it a "Motto of Honor Flight. It says, "If you can read this, thank a teacher. If you can read this in English, thank a veteran." That's how it starts out. Then I wrote: I want to commit to my memory all of the fabulous trip I took to our nation's capital recently before the vagrancies of time robs me of the facts, embellish or just forget all that was said and done. The last week of September 2009, I returned from a three-day trip to Washington, D.C. to tour the World War II Memorial and other national memorials as an honored guest of Honor Flight Network. Honor Flight Network is a non-profit organization that was created solely to honor American veterans for all their sacrifices in World War II by transporting them to Washington, D.C. to tour their World War II Memorial. Honor Flight is funded by donations from the private sector and supported by volunteers with over 80 hubs in the United States. They do not and they will not accept a single penny from a veteran. Presently veterans of World War II only have been honored, but the long-term goal is to recognize Korean and Vietnam veterans as well. Earl Morse, the founder and patron of Honor Flight, lives in Springfield, Ohio. The big man with a booming voice. I liked him immediately. Morse had a 21-year career in the US Air Force serving as a medic on evacuation aircraft in the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He later became the physician assistant and attended the Academy. Upon retirement, he took a job with the Veterans Administration working at a clinic in Ohio. During the time he spent in the Air Force, he became a licensed pilot, as was his

father Earl Morse, Sr. Shortly after the World War II Memorial was dedicated in May of 2004, Earl and his father flew to Washington, D.C. to tour the memorial. Several weeks later, they decided to return the capital to tour the memorial again. Earl said, "We have some extra seats in the plane. Why don't we ask some World War II veterans to go with us?" They agreed and Earl asked one of his patrons, who he knew to be a veteran of World War II, if he had ever visited the new World War II Memorial in D.C. The veteran answered, "No." Earl invited him to go with he and his dad free of charge. The veteran broke down and cried. As Earl told us, his emotions got the better of him and they were both standing there crying. A nurse from the clinic appeared at this stage and asked Earl, "Why are you crying, did you have to tell him he had a short time to live?" Earl told the nurse the story and the nurse started sobbing and stopped long enough to recommend another veteran to Earl to fill the extra seat in the aircraft. Because Earl and his dad loved flying, they are members of the flying club in the Springfield-Dayton, Ohio area. He asked his club members if they would volunteer to fly some World War II veterans to D.C. to tour the World War II Memorial. They began filling those empty seats until they outgrew their small aircraft. They moved on to charter jets and more and more veterans flew to D.C. Today, several thousand veterans each year travel to D.C. to see their memorial. Jim McLaughlin, Chairman of the Honor Flight, is a thin, wiry individual with a warm, friendly personality. The story goes that he took one of Earl's flights to the memorial in Washington. McLaughlin quickly organized and planned the tour for the Lone Eagle veterans as well as the TLC veterans. A Lone Eagle veteran is one located more than two hours, driving hours, away from the hub and whose application has been submitted for six months or longer. TLC does not mean "tender loving care." Rather, it means "The Last Chance." Honor Flight will accept any veteran, any veteran, who has a terminal illness of less than one year, whether it's a World War II, Korean, or Vietnam veteran. Their names go to the top of the list.

From the West Coast, the tour of honor is a three-day trip: the first day to fly to Baltimore, Maryland, the second day to tour all the memorials in D.C., and the third day to return home. Honor

Flight requires a guardian to accompany each veteran. Not in the legal meaning of the word, but as a caregiver. My son Bobby was my guardian and took his responsibility to me. A spouse cannot be a guardian, there must be a generation difference between the veteran and the guardian. How often does Honor Flight have these tours and how many veterans are honored? In the month of October, there were approximately 30 groups on the tour schedule with 2500 to 4000 veterans being honored. The start of the day of the tour in September was overcast and warm, with showers forecasted late afternoon. We departed from the Baltimore Hilton Airport Hotel at 8 AM by bus for the one-hour trip into Washington, D.C. As we proceeded towards our destination, we viewed the PBS documentary *World War II Memorial: A Testament to Freedom* narrated by Tim Russett. Our first stop was the Tomb of the Unknowns, also known as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. At Arlington National Cemetery, we watched the changing of the guard. You cannot drive freely into Arlington National Cemetery. Honor Flight has a special dispensation from the National Park Service where a scout car would lead us to the changing of the guard area. Sentinels guard the Tomb of the Unknowns 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Those guards must be between 5'10" and 6'4" and have a waist size we would all die for. From October to March, the guards are changed every hour, and from April to September every half hour for the benefit of the viewing public. The guards march in front of the Tomb, in twenty-one seconds, count twenty-one, about face and then reverse the march to the other end. Their actions are mechanical, almost robot-like. Why 21 steps? Because 21 is the highest tribute you can pay the military, that is the 21 gun salute. The rifle they carry is on the side away from the tomb, right shoulder one way and the left shoulder coming back. The quietness is amazing. The only sound you hear are the slapping of the rifle during the transfer of the rifle from one shoulder to the other and the crack of the guard's heel as he does an about-face to march the other way. When it is time for the changing of the guard, the Relief Commander emerges from the Memorial Display Room located beneath the Memorial Amphitheater. As he barks out the commands, he faces and directs the people to stand and remain quiet while the change

takes place. I'm quoting some of these rules. McLaughlin from Ohio said, "I brought a tour this spring, several of the Honor Flight veterans were in wheelchairs off to the side watching the procedure. When the Relief Commander asked everyone to remain quiet and to stand, several of the Honor Flight veterans struggled to get out of their wheelchairs onto their feet to stand. The Relief Commander out of the corner of his eye saw these veterans struggling to stand as ordered, aborted his commands and quietly asked the veterans to remain seated before proceeding with the ceremony." The changing of the guard ceremony is very formal. The Commander makes a detailed, white-glove inspection of the guard coming on duty. It is choreographed beautifully. When the exchange is completed, the Commander and the relieved guard march back into the Memorial Display Room and the change is then made. This is repeated 24/7.

McLaughlin speaking, "I want you to be aware of something and watching for a unique maneuver by the guard only known to us. When they know there are Honor Flight veterans present, the guards make a distinct subtle shuffle with one foot as he reverses course in honor of the veterans. No one else is ever aware of this unless you are looking for it to happen. Please watch for it."

The Kennedy graves were at the other side of the cemetery so we didn't see them. Audie Murphy's, the most decorated soldier in World War II, grave is located under a tree in front of the Tomb of the Unknowns. From Arlington National Cemetery, we bussed to the World War II Memorial on the Capitol Mall. In it, many other Honor Flight veterans from other hubs joined us. Four hundred to five hundred Honor Flight veterans congregated together. Placing the World War II Memorial between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial reflects the importance of World War II in preserving the ideals won by George Washington and defended under Abraham Lincoln. The memorial is oval shaped with pillars representing the 52 US States, Territories, and District of Columbia surrounding a water basin with a gushing fountain. The twin Atlantic and Pacific Pavilions at either end symbolizing a war fought across two oceans. The reflecting pond and

looking towards the Lincoln Memorial is the Freedom Wall with 4,000 gold stars representing the more than 400,000 Americans that gave their lives in the war.

McLaughlin speaking again, “The World War II Memorial is just that, a memorial to honor the men and women who served in the military in World War II. It is not a lesson in history. That is left to museums. There are some lasting quotations carved around the walls such as Roosevelt’s ‘Day of Infamy’ speech, Churchill’s ‘On the Land and Sea’ speech, Eisenhower’s D-Day speech, and Truman’s speech. Senator Bob Dole, himself a decorated World War II veteran, and his wife Elizabeth Dole, former President of the American Red Cross, are frequent visitors to the World War II Memorial to greet and to visit those Honor Flight veterans.”

McLaughlin again, “I would like to caution you when you meet Senator Dole, do not try to shake his hand or put an arm around his shoulder. His right arm is paralyzed and he has arthritis in his left arm, which is very painful. On the other hand, Elizabeth is a hugger. She loves to be hugged.”

Here I am speaking: And I got my hug. I remarked to Senator Dole that I was from the other Washington, Washington State, he either didn’t hear me or didn’t understand what I meant, but he grabbed my name tag and said, “Robert? That’s a pretty good name, isn’t it?” We proceeded to Hains Point on the Potomac River for a picnic box lunch. Arby’s provided delicious deli sandwiches, chips and a fruit salad. Guardians made sure we had plenty of cold bottled water. At our picnic table was a Navy veteran who served aboard an LST in Europe and later in the Pacific, and Air Force veteran, and myself, a Navy Airedale. We took turns sharing our war stories. I regaled our table with the story of being shot down, wounded, and ultimately rescued by a US destroyer. The guardian of the Air Force guy was entering all this information in his cell phone so he could follow up in detail on the return home to Arizona.

When we resumed our tour, we headed toward the Vietnam Wall and the Korean Memorial. The skies opened up and the showers came. We had an option to remain on the bus for a tour of downtown Washington, D.C. or put on a poncho and raingear to visit those memorials. We stayed

on the bus, which was a wise decision as those who chose to get out to see the memorials looked like drowned rats when they returned to the bus. The showers continued as we moved on to the Iwo Jima Memorial and prevented us from getting off the bus to view the remarkable Mt. Suribachi statue. The next stop was the Air Force Memorial, this on a promontory in Arlington, Virginia overlooking the Pentagon and adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery. Central to the design of the monument are stainless steel spires that soar skyward with the highest reaching 270 feet above the three-acre elevated site. It reminded one of the Navy Blue Angels maneuver. While riding towards the Navy Monument, our last stop, we pulled parallel to the Pentagon where we could clearly see where the terrorists crashed a jet into the building on September 11, 2001. The showers returned once again for our stop at the Navy Monument. Only the Navy diehards got off of the bus to take snapshots of the Lone Sailor. Then it was off to Baltimore and the hotel for a banquet. To conclude a busy day, we were invited to join the contingent of the 100<sup>th</sup> Honor Flight veterans that had arrived earlier in the day from Rochester, New York. The following morning, we all caught our respective flights back to our homes, thankful to Honor Flight for honoring us and giving us the opportunity to see our World War II Memorial.

McLaughlin speaking again, “Earlier this year, Southwest Airlines came to Honor Flight with an offer of 1000 free tickets if the airline were named the exclusive airline of Honor Flights. Honor Flights refused the offer because Southwest didn’t cover all the cities where there were World War II veterans. After some negotiation, Southwest was satisfied and agreed to be named “Official Airline of Honor Flight” and increased their 1000 free seats to 3000 seats.”

I’m speaking here: The prime responsibility of the guardian is the safety of the veteran. Each veteran is given a colored t-shirt with the words “Honor Flight” on it. The guardians were given a similar t-shirt of a different color to distinguish between the two. When we loaded the bus, the guardians were the first on and the first off the bus before the veterans. Some of the guardians stood at the stop of the top of bus steps and others at the bottom to help the veterans prepare for a soft



landing, if a stumble or fall occurred. Extra wheelchairs and two coolers of bottled water followed us all day long.

This was an Air Force guy from Apache Junction, Arizona speaking, by the name of Les, “I was riding in the elevator at the Hilton and a man got on the elevator, read my t-shirt and asked me what Honor Flight was all about. I told him and the man went on to state that he was a pilot of Air Force One, the President’s aircraft. He had flown for four different presidents. I can’t remember which presidents he flew for. Then another time, I met a man on the elevator and he asked me about my t-shirt and the Honor Flight program. I told him I was in the US Air Force in World War II, served on a B-17, and was stationed at an airfield in Scotland. I told him the name of the town that was closest to the airfield. The man spoke up and this was his hometown in Scotland and as a seven-year-old lad he would go down to the airfield and watch the B-17s take off for missions over Germany.”

McLaughlin speaking again, “I had an Honor Flight veteran on one of my tours. When we returned home, this veteran was so impressed with what Honor Flight was doing that he wanted to make a \$100,000 donation to Honor Flight so that other veterans could go see their memorial. I had to turn him down because our charter does not allow us to take accept any donations from any veteran. The veteran kept arguing, said that he had money than he had years to live and he wanted to give it to Honor Flight. I finally worked out a deal with him. He donated \$100,000 to his local VFW Post which doled out the money to Honor Flight as needed.”

Another veteran speaking, Bok from Rochester, New York, “We left Rochester, New York with two bus-loads of Honor Flight veterans aboard a Airtran charter early this morning. We spent the day touring the World War II Memorial and other memorials, attended this banquet tonight, and will return home tomorrow. We had quite a send-off back at Rochester. There were volunteers who traveled as far away as 45 miles from the airport at 2AM in the morning to wish us well. They said they would be there to welcome us back tomorrow. When the Airtran’s jet landed here in Baltimore

this morning, the pilot and co-pilot turned off the engines and secured the flight deck. They ran out to grab two wheelchairs and the two pilots pushed two disabled veterans up the ramp into the terminals. I brought my son as my guardian. He's 52 years old, has six grandchildren and has never flown in an airplane before. Do you think he's excited?"

These are my closing remarks for this remembrance of my trip to see the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. I'm speaking, and this is on my way home from Washington, D.C. I was sitting in a jam-packed terminal in Kansas City waiting for our flight to be called. The only seat available to me in the waiting room was next to a clean-cut young man probably in his late 30s. He was most intent on watching the NFL game on the television monitor. During the timeout, he leaned over and asked me if I enjoyed touring the World War II Memorial. How did he know? I wasn't wearing my Honor Flight t-shirt, but I had on a cap that identified me as a World War II veteran. However, my guardian son was wearing his guardian shirt. The young man said that he had seen information about the Honor Flight program on TV and that's how he knew about it. The football game resumed. Shortly after, he made eye contact again and he said, with tears in his eyes, "You know what? You guys saved the world. Thanks for your service." He lost all interest in the football game, and besides, our respective flights were being called. I thought about his remarks on the way home. Six of the seven continents were at war 1939 – 1945. Truly a world conflict. As terrible and as horrible as the Korean Conflict, Vietnam War and other conflicts, generally speaking they were confined to only one country. Today, if you call any veteran a World War II hero, he would probably dismiss the question with an, "Aw shucks, it was nothing," response, but the closer to the true answer might be, "We were just doing our job." If I reflect on my tour of duty trip, it could very well be that the veterans of World War II individually and collectively saved the world and became the greatest generation. The one thing I regret most about telling this story is being unable to put my intense feelings in the words I have written. It was the experience of a lifetime. Bob Molleston.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's very, very good.

Bob, again, thank you for your time today.

Mr. Molleston:

Thank you, Richard. I didn't know I was going to get so wound up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fine. Thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Molleston:

You're very welcome.

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