

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Research and Education Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
John E. Freemann
March 16, 2012
Air Group Six
Pilot SB2C
U.S.S. Hancock CV-19

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is March 16, 2012. I am interviewing Mr. John E. “Jack” Freemann by telephone. His phone number is 484-288-2158. His address is 329 Freedom Boulevard, Coatsville, PA 19320. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Research and Education Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Jack, 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.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, tell me about you for just a second.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Jack, now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum. So let me read this to you. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Freemann:

Fine, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now 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. So do you have a son or daughter or some one we could contact if we needed to to find you?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, that would be my daughter because she’s closer here. My son is in Arizona.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It doesn’t make a difference where they are. All we do is call them up and say “Where’s Jack?”

Mr. Freemann:

This would be my daughter. Her name is Jill Daniels.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's the first name? Jill?

Mr. Freemann:

Jill, like Jack and Jill. Jill Daniels.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a phone number for her?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah. It's 610-793-4407.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hope we'll never need that, but you never know. OK. What is your birthdate?

Mr. Freemann:

11-1-21.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Freemann:

Newtown Square, PA.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Freemann:

I had one brother, two and a half years older.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. He was in World War II, was he?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He's no longer living?

Mr. Freemann:

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was he in the Pacific or Europe? Where was he?

Mr. Freemann:

He was around the Atlantic, around Bermuda, up and down the coast. I guess looking for submarines. I told you he was flying PBYS.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Freemann:

Well, I know my father lost everything. I think it made us stronger, that's what I think. From that experience we had to work hard to get anything we wanted and it wasn't handed to us. I think it was a good thing in the long run. It hurt at times but in the overall picture, I think it was good.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what was your father's occupation?

Mr. Freemann:

He sold material handling equipment. You know, like fork lift trucks and things like that, conveyors. In sales basically.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you say he lost everything during the Depression, then.

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, he did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Freemann:

I went to Lower Merion High School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what year did you graduate there?

Mr. Freemann:

1940.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Freemann:

I went to New Mexico Military Institute which is in Roswell, New Mexico. We rode government horses out there all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you decide to go out there?

Mr. Freemann:

I looked at schools, junior colleges, and I just picked that. It had a pretty good rating so I went there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall where you were when you heard about that?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, I was at Bucknell University.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where is that?

Mr. Freemann:

Lewisburg, PA.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were you doing there?

Mr. Freemann:

From New Mexico, the next year I went to Bucknell.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were you studying there?

Mr. Freemann:

Commerce and finance.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, when you heard about Pearl Harbor, how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, we all wanted to get in it as soon as possible.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you go into the service then?

Mr. Freemann:

I joined the Navy in June of 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's when you went to active duty?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, I'll tell you what the funny part is. They called it CPT Navy. At that time they were trying to get the high schools to get a group together from Lower Merion for instance and they didn't have the twelve people to go yet so they said I had to go to CPT Navy in Grove City, PA. So I flew there in Piper Cubs and things like that and then they said they weren't ready yet to go to pre-flight so I had to go to Bloomsburg, PA and I flew bi-planes there. Then after that they said, "OK, we're all going down to Chapel Hill, pre-flight down in Chapel Hill, NC." That's where I went.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now CPT stands for Civilian Pilot Training, right?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have civilian instructors there?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now how much time did you get in the Piper Cub?

Mr. Freemann:

Oh, it wasn't too much. You know, I never got my records. You know you keep the number of hours.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yeah, your logbook.

Mr. Freemann:

I got a logbook with everything. They didn't include Grove City or Bloomsburg. I didn't get paid then and we wore CCC uniforms. You know what that was?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, the Civilian Conservation Corps, right. That was part of the Depression program.

Mr. Freemann:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you solo?

Mr. Freemann:

Oh, I soloed up at Grove City, I guess that would have been right. Probably July or August of 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did it feel like to solo?

Mr. Freemann:

You really felt you accomplished something, you know. And you could do it. It was great.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what kind of a bi-wing plane did you fly?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, I remember, a Waco, up at Bloomsburg. I remember one they called it a Fleet and there was one another but I don't remember the name.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about a Stearman? Did you fly the Stearman?

Mr. Freemann:

Later on, yeah, there was a Stearman, too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's a bi-wing. I forget what the Navy called it, they called it something.

Mr. Freemann:

N3N.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, the N3N, right.

Mr. Freemann:

After that after I got out of Chapel Hill, I went to Glenview Naval Air Station, out near Chicago.

That's where I flew... That was in the winter time and I flew bi-planes there. I guess N3Ns or Stearman or the other.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any kind of boot camp?

Mr. Freemann:

At Chapel Hill, that was all like boot camp. Our pre-flight school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I mean, did you have a lot of marching and that sort of thing?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, yes. At Chapel Hill that's what it was all about. We studied meteorology and a lot of other type of things for aviation. But most of it was physical.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you joined, you volunteered, right?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You volunteered for the flight, the Navy Air Corps?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what all happened up at Glenview?

Mr. Freemann:

That's where you flew Piper Cubs, I mean the bi-planes, the N3Ns and from there they sent me to Corpus Christi. I remember being down there in the South, Beesville and Kingsville and all around there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm at Alice. Did you ever get to Alice?

Mr. Freemann:

No, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

We had a touch and go field here in Alice.

Mr. Freemann:

I just remember Kingsville and Beesville and Corpus of course. When we were there it was hot, I can tell you that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yeah. Before you came down to Corpus, what else did you do up there in Glenview?

Mr. Freemann:

Well basically we studied all the courses like what I took at Grove City and Bloomsburg and Chapel Hill we took some courses but we mostly flew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, when you got to Corpus, what did you do down here?

Mr. Freemann:

Down there? That's when we started flying the Vultee Vibrator. You heard of that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir, I have, the BT19 I think it is.

Mr. Freemann:

Something like that. You know, then we got into the SNJ which was a lot better.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's what the Army called the AT6.

Mr. Freemann:

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That has retractable gear, doesn't it?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes. Let me tell you a story. One time there was something wrong with a plane and you switched tanks, gas and it wouldn't switch and I had to make an emergency landing in a cornfield.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, how did that go?

Mr. Freemann:

I did all right but they were going to wash me out because they figured I did something wrong and they were on the way to get rid of me as a pilot. Then they found out somebody else took that plane up a couple of days later and the same thing happened to them. The engine stopped when they switched from one gas tank to the other. So I didn't get thrown out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when did you graduate?

Mr. Freemann:

I got out there in October of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is that when you got your commission?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, my wings and commission.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, your wings, right. You were an Ensign at that point, right?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go?

Mr. Freemann:

From there I went to dive-bombing school, Cecil Field, and that's near Jacksonville, FL.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, we flew SBDs and I remember they came from the Ranger. Remember the carrier, Ranger?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir, I have.

Mr. Freemann:

That was number four and they had number four printed on the planes and the first time we took them in to go for a dive at a target, my roommate went all the way in and crashed. But that's where we went for dive-bombing school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He didn't pull out, huh?

Mr. Freemann:

He didn't pull out. I don't know what happened.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me ask you a question. Back at Corpus did you have any kind of gunnery training there?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

In the SNJ?

Mr. Freemann:

I think I did. I remember even, you know, once in a while you'd have to take the plane out with a sleeve on it. They would shoot at the sleeve. I think that was in Corpus as well as at Cecil Field. I never did that. I hope I didn't shoot any of your cattle.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, the King Ranch complained that they would shoot up their windmills and some times their cattle.

Mr. Freemann:

You know where I live up here there used to be a King Ranch up here near Coatsville, PA, where I am. I was just riding out there and they had a thousand acres or something. They would send the cattle up here and fatten them up. You probably know about that. Go around where the ranch is and I think they parceled it out and you had to buy, was it a hundred or two hundred acres or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was the King Ranch there in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Freemann:

But they got big estates out of it. It's beautiful.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You graduated from the dive-bombing school to get your commission, is that right? That's when you got your wings?

Mr. Freemann:

No, I got my wings at Corpus Christi.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, you got your wings at Corpus?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, that's when I became an Ensign.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, before you went to Jacksonville, then?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, I was an Ensign when I went to Jacksonville.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good, I'm glad we got that clarified.

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, because at dive-bombing school you had to have your wings.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that dive-bombing school?

Mr. Freemann:

At Cecil Field. I don't think they have it anymore. It's right near Jacksonville.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was it?

Mr. Freemann:

Oh, how was it? Well I told you about my roommate, right?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you finished there, where did you go?

Mr. Freemann:

Well from there I went to North Allen, California. You know where that is? San Diego. That was called CASU5. Did you ever hear that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir.

Mr. Freemann:

CASU5. That was at North Allen and from there I went to Alameda, California. Then from there we went to Santa Rosa and that's where Air Group 6, which I was in. That was the only Air Group during the war that went out three times. They were in the battle around Pearl Harbor and Midway and then they went out again the second time and that's when Butch O'Hare got shot down. You know, O'Hare Field. He was in Air Group 6 and then I went out and we went out the last time and until the end of the war. At Santa Rosa we were all formed up and at that point we had two fighter groups and we had a dive-bombing group and had a torpedo group.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you join Air Group 6? Roughly.

Mr. Freemann:

We got a book... Roughly... June 1944. That's when Hank Miller, our Air Group Commander, came in. He's the guy that taught Doolittle how to take off from a carrier. Hank Miller, he was a good person and a great flier and a great leader. At all the reunions and everything and he and

Jimmy... Hank Miller used to box and so did Doolittle and they weren't too big you know. They were only about 5'6" or so. But that was June of 1944 when we formed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened.

Mr. Freemann:

Then after that we got on a troop ship and we went to Hilo. Going out by the way there were some Jap subs out there and we went from San Francisco down to San Diego and then we continued out and we went to Hilo, Hawaii. We were all together then and we practiced out there in Hilo, dropping bombs and dropping napalm bombs and shooting rockets, etc.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you were the pilot on the SBD, right? Which plane did you have then? The SBD or the SB2C

Mr. Freemann:

At that time when we got to California when I went from Cecil Field we had SB2Cs, Helldivers, SB2Cs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were the pilot, right?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all happened there at Hilo?

Mr. Freemann:

We just practiced a lot. That's one good thing. I'll tell you I think we were trained for combat by the time we got out there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever get into Honolulu on leave or liberty?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes. I think I got a ticket for running around in a Jeep at night. I've still got it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was in Honolulu or where?

Mr. Freemann:

On Oahu.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On Oahu.

Mr. Freemann:

We went to three different islands. We used to go to Maui and Oahu and Hawaii, the big island.

That's the only three we went to.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Freemann:

Let's see. From Hilo we went to...By the way, you know Tokyo Rose? She announced when we left Santa Rosa. I mean, when we left Hilo to go farther out to Ulithi. You know where Ulithi is?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes.

Mr. Freemann:

MOG MOG. That was the officers' club. When we went there, Tokyo Rose announced, "Well I see Air Group 6 is coming out again" and she played some nice music for us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's amazing what all she knew.

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, well there was a lot of Japanese on Hawaii, you know that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yes, right. But even so, people in New Guinea. I know one man I interviewed and they said she called the names of the people there on New Guinea.

Mr. Freemann:

Oh, my goodness.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, she knew who they were.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, they didn't call my name. Somebody was inside on that one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah. Now when you got to Ulithi, what did you do there? How did you travel to Ulithi? By troop ship or what?

Mr. Freemann:

At the time we were there a kamikaze came in and hit one of the carriers. All the carriers were out there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, Ulithi was a big meeting place for all those ships.

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, yes. The whole fleet was there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anyway, when you got to Ulithi, what did you do then?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, then maybe practiced a couple times and then it was like in March, that's when I first got into combat, hitting Okinawa and other islands around there and whatever, around Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what ship were you on?

Mr. Freemann:

The Hancock. That was an Essex type carrier, a big one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's the number of that? CV what?

Mr. Freemann:

Nineteen.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You joined that at Ulithi?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's where your whole group joined it was on there?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes. The whole group. You know we had F6Fs, we had F4Us and TBFs and SB2Cs. That's four different planes we had on there. They used fighter-bombers

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's the Corsairs, right.

Mr. Freemann:

They gave them a different name. The F6F was called the fighter.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, who flew the Corsair? Was it the Marines or the Navy?

Mr. Freemann:

The Navy, all Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All Navy. OK. What were conditions like on the Hancock?

Mr. Freemann:

I thought it was good. I had no complaints. Of course we had a lot of I guess you talked to Bob Molleston, did he ever tell you we were hit quite a few times.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, right.

Mr. Freemann:

We were hit real bad, he told you that and we went back to Pearl. We were beside the... Did you ever hear about the Franklin?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir. Well it happened up close to Japan, right.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, the two carriers worked together and I went down to see to the engines down in the bottom of the Hancock and they blew torpedo defense and I came all the way up and when I got up I looked out across. I could see the Franklin and I could see all the things on fire, the hangar deck, the rockets were going off and the poor guys in the Franklin. We stopped launching aircraft and I guess they didn't at the time and a kamikaze came in there and hit them and then about a week later we got hit. Something like that. Crashed on our carrier.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me, what was your first combat mission?

Mr. Freemann:

First combat mission. It was a raid on Okinawa. We dropped bombs, shot rockets.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had rockets on your plane then?

Mr. Freemann:

We had eight rockets. You know they had too much on that plane so we had trouble taking off. You know you had a extra gas tank under one wing, radar bubble on the other and then we had four rockets under each wing. Five inch rockets under each wing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Plus a bomb?

Mr. Freemann:

No, rockets.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Plus a bomb?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, plus a thousand pound bomb.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, man, that was loaded.

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, well we lost guys taking off.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many combat missions did you fly?

Mr. Freemann:

About twenty-five, twenty-eight, somewhere in there. Nothing compared to some guys. I would have been flying more if the war went on. Did Molleston tell you about, no he wouldn't, he got shot down before that. I'll come to that later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all happened there when you were on the Hancock?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, I told you we got hit. Kamikaze hit us, I think it was. Knocked us out. I think that carrier got hit about six times. There was a destroyer that got hit while refueling. The kamikaze hit was on April 7. I got a picture of it all smoking and everything.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hit by kamikaze, huh?

Mr. Freemann:

Yep. We lost about fifty guys in that one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now where all did you attack besides Okinawa?

Mr. Freemann:

I'm looking at my logbook. I just put Okinawa and the islands around it. Before they invaded Okinawa, we were hitting them hard.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So your 25-28 missions, most of those were in the Okinawa area?

Mr. Freemann:

I'd say Japan, I'd say just as many at Japan. We even hit Wake Island. After we got hit we went back out again, you know, after we got hit and we had a strike on Wake Island and then we continued... That was like on June 20 and then we got back to Japan in July and we were hitting Honshu, Japan all over. Hokaido, all up and down, trying to hit all the airfields and we went down on some carriers at Kuri and Kobe. That's where we went.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what date did you say you got hit by the kamikaze, April 20?

Mr. Freemann:

There were three war cruises with the Air Group 6 which I told you. We lost more as far as I can see we lost more in the third war cruise than they did in any of them. Mostly from anti-aircraft. Lost most of our planes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your worst bombing mission?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, when I got hit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you get hit? Tell me about that.

Mr. Freemann:

I got hit. My plane... Half of the strikes that I went on I had holes in my plane. I did a lot of strafing afterward. You know, you drop your bomb, then this was around Japan. Then strafed a lot and shot rockets. Maybe I was looking for trouble but that's how I got hit most of the time. What was the question you asked? There was one other one. When we hit Kuri they had anti-aircraft. Did you know that each gun had a different color burst.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I didn't know that.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, it looked like a rainbow. There would be bursts in blue, or red and that showed how close each gun was shooting out near the plane. I thought that was interesting.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that is.

Mr. Freemann:

But around in July hitting some of those over Japan with the anti-aircraft I only saw about three or four Jap planes anywhere close to us because by that time they didn't have much. But they had a lot of AA and they were good at it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get shot down any time?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, so did Molleston. I got shot down. That's when I got shot down over. That was August 9th.

That's when they dropped the bomb on Nagasaki. I'm dropping a thousand pound bomb and they're dropping an atomic bomb on the same day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you get shot down at?

Mr. Freemann:

It was off an airfield. They called it.... It was called Matsushima.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is that an island?

Mr. Freemann:

No, it's on the mainland, an airfield.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you crash when you were shot down?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, I went out toward the fleet and I didn't... When Bob M Molleston got hit in the leg and everything. I didn't get hit but we lost communications. I hardly had any control of the plane because of where the anti-aircraft stuff hit. I knew I wasn't going to make it into a carrier. So I figured I got to the what they called the Tomcats. I got near a destroyer which was called the Harrison and I made the water landing the best I could and we got the raft out and Molly helped even though his leg was shot up. He was a great guy, still is. We both got out and I got him up on the raft and I got up. I started thinking about sharks and the blood and everything and all of a sudden I got extra energy and got up on the raft. I hit my head when I crashed, a little bit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now Molleston was the gunner on your plane, right?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, Bob Molleston. You interviewed him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then the destroyer picked you up then?

Mr. Freemann:

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You weren't injured but Bob got hit in the leg.

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, I just hit my head where the sight was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did it take your plane to sink after it hit the water?

Mr. Freemann:

I really don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Real quickly?

Mr. Freemann:

No, we had time to get the big raft out. You know we got a raft underneath our parachutes which was connected with your parachutes. We had a bigger raft and we got that out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened/

Mr. Freemann:

They picked us up and we got on the destroyer. I think we spent that night on it and then the next day they brought us back. You know that seat you sit in, one ship to the other. Bob he was on a stretcher and they got him across and he was on the carrier. He didn't fly with me any more but the only thing is, on the next flight we had a strike on Tokyo which was called the Shibaura. You put dashes D-e-n-k-s. It was ten miles. I think it was the electronic plant in Tokyo and we were ten miles from that place when they called us back. Bob Molleston wasn't with me then. Hirst was with me then. But the main thing is that they called us back and said "Jettison your bombs and return to base." Of course we thought the war was over and it turned out to be but they didn't really say the war's over. That was the last flight. That was August 15. So I was up for over three hours, three and a half hours, you know, flying, but we returned to base and it was all over. There was an interesting time one time. I don't know why Bob wasn't with me but the fella's name was Hirst. He was a gunner, too, but he went to me when we hit Kuri and afterwards I told you we went out and I did a lot of strafing. You know where they had 20mm guns on us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You had 20mm in the wings or where?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, in the wings.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many twenties did you have?

Mr. Freemann:

Two.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Two. One in each wing?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah. And I told you we had four five-inch rockets under each wing. I went strafing and we couldn't find many targets to go after around this beach. It was like July 25 or 24 and on July 24 with this Bob Hirst we found three camouflaged cruisers I guess you would call them. Before that they were so camouflaged you couldn't see them. I just happened to be flying close to it and I saw them and all I had was the 20mm. Thank goodness they weren't active. I went in and took pictures of them by shooting my guns. That's the only way you could get pictures. Shot your 20mm. Then they looked at them when we went back and they said yeah, there were three camouflaged cruisers that the Japs had. There's some other stories. Any questions you got?

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got more stories, go ahead and tell me the stories.

Mr. Freemann:

We were looking for targets. We hit the airfields pretty good and we were looking for ships, you know. We got a lot of carriers, their carriers and their battleship, the what was it they called it, the Yata

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Yamato?

Mr. Freemann:

Yamato, yes. We got the Nagato but I don't remember the Yamato. I think we went out looking for the Yamato and when we went usually it was an early strike and then in the afternoon there was another strike. But with a different group. You know what I mean? Like there were so many dive bombers. Let's say half of us went off in the morning and came back and then the other half would go off in the afternoon. You know, if it would work that way, that's the way we did it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, any stories you got, go ahead and tell me the stories.

Mr. Freemann:

We got hit. I know I went on two strikes that day. In other words, I went in the morning strike and they didn't have anybody to fly. I don't know what happened, maybe somebody got hit and didn't make it. But I flew about ten hours that day. That's when I got hit at that airfield that I told you about.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now how many planes did Air Group 6 off the Hancock lose. Do you have any idea? Quite a few?

Mr. Freemann:

I know how many guys were missing or killed. I can tell you that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, that's what I'm looking for.

Mr. Freemann:

(Counts) Two times seventeen, that would be what?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thirty-four.

Mr. Freemann:

Thirty-four, now wait a minute (counts again). And another twenty like. At least fifty some.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Fifty-four that would be. OK. That's out of all four different kinds of planes you lost that many.

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's quite a few.

Mr. Freemann:

Some of them, you know, had the gunners along with the pilots.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, sure, right. Of course the TBF had three people in the crew.

Mr. Freemann:

Right. Here's the last war cruise. It says, "We destroyed 39 aircraft in the air and they destroyed 347 planes on the ground. And then it says in the warships we damaged 16 and the Jap merchant ships, they sunk 11 and damaged 81."

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, wow.

Mr. Freemann:

If that helps you any.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that does, that's good.

Mr. Freemann:

It gives the tonnage but that's....

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's the kind of stuff we want. Anything that has to do with the war we like to get it recorded.

Mr. Freemann:

You know I got a whole book here. One of the fellas wrote up a book all about Air Group 6 and it shows that we were on the first cruises but on the last and you know how you got Air Group 6 that was from the Enterprise, that was the sixth carrier. It was the first aircraft group in action, December 7, 1941. I'll just read this to you for what it's worth, OK? "Lost the first Navy pilots to the Japs at Pearl Harbor. (This is all Air Group 6) First bomb on Jap territory and that was in Naval action in the Marshals in 1942. The 6th covered the first raid on Tokyo. That's Doolittle's

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what about Doolittle's raid? What did you do there?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, the air Group, the fighters, they were protected by Air Group 6. Then we supported the initial amphibious assault on Tulagi and Guadalcanal, and that was in 1942. And then the 6th was the first carrier pilots based ashore at Guadalcanal. That was 1942. It was the first carrier air group to use night interceptor fighters. That was in 1943. I think that's was when Butch O'Hare got shot down. They covered the first landing on the Japanese pre-war territories, the Marshalls, that was 1944. It was the carrier group to have three war cruisers which I told you, in World War II and they covered the first rescue of Sommerville and that was at Tagoshima Bay and that was in March 1945. Another plane, I don't know what happened to the plane, but he made a water landing right in Japan in the water right in the circle and they came in and rescued them with the OS2U, you know what that is? The 6th was among the first carrier planes to raid the Jap home island of Hokaido. That's the top island. That was in July 1945. Then we provided the first air cover for the first naval bombardment of the Jap home island. That was July 15, 1945. Then it

says Air Group 6 was the first in many things. Sixth was the last in one. One of its pilots shot down the last kamikaze to attack the Third Fleet August 15, 1945. That's all about Air Group 6.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thursday, March 20, a continuation with the interview. OK, Jack, go ahead. What is it you wanted to say?

Mr. Freemann:

I just wanted to tell you. Some of the things, not only going on the bombing raids and strafing. Some of the weather over there at times when you were flying wing to wing and we all flew pretty tight, you know, wing to wing. You would get in there and you couldn't even see anybody to fly on. We were close. Most of your clouds, you went in to fly wing to wing. A few times, I think it happened about two or three times, we were all in formation, you know, we've got the dive bombers in front, the torpedoes back of us, fighters above us and fighters below us and all of a sudden you run into these clouds and you can't fly wing to wing and you don't know where to go, you know what I mean? That happened twice and you just say I'll try to keep it steady and keep going straight ahead and you go by instruments then. But that was just as scary as some of the other things.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were there any accidents in either one of those?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes, there were a lot of accidents. Halsey wanted to take a picture of the fleet one time and the weather was bad and they cracked up, a couple of them. We flew over the Missouri when they were signing the peace treaty. Of course everybody was up there, the B29s, the B24s, but the Navy, we were there. I think I told you we flew after the war we flew over prisoner of war camps

and dropped bags of food and cigarettes and all that. We had pictures of that. Prisoners of war they had on the roofs POWs. It was interesting.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the two times you all had to fly through those clouds, did you have any accidents on those two times?

Mr. Freemann:

I'm not sure. All I know I looked and then we did come out and then we all had to join up again. Well, that would be about twenty, forty, about sixty airplanes. But that was just one of the things. The other thing I wanted to tell you. I understand there were more people killed training than there were in combat.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I read that, yes.

Mr. Freemann:

Somebody else told me all about that. That was something to think about.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Particularly in England.

Mr. Freemann:

Killed in training, you know you never hear about them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think that was particularly true in England. They had that bad weather there. There was an awful lot of them killed in England.

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, but I mean over here, just training for carrier landings and...

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I'm talking about the training they were doing in England. Just strictly the training, here, there and everywhere.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, I guess I don't know anything else you would like to know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've got some questions here for you. How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Freemann:

I think it was good. I mean we were losing guys here and there but I know one thing I, myself, we got hit real bad and went back to Pearl. We were going back to the States and then we had to go back out again. That's not a good feeling and then I think about some of the other guys who had been out there twice or three times maybe, how they would feel. You know, you feel I got through that, let somebody else. But the morale was good because we wanted to win.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you all ever cross the equator?

Mr. Freemann:

No, but I crossed that other..

Mr. Misenhimer:

The International Date Line?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, yeah. We had some kind of ceremony. I never crossed the equator.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Freemann:

I guess when I got shot down. That was the most. Another time going out on some dives over some carriers over Japan you could hardly see because of all AA coming up. I try to talk to my gunner and nothing came out. You know you keep going down to get your target but that was kind of scary. Those two times were the worst. That wasn't the only time we had AA but I mean that was the heaviest when we went down on the carriers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Freemann:

Oh, yes. I thought I told you. When we left Hilo, the first time we went out, when we left Hilo, Rose got on there and said, "Well, I see Air Group 6 is coming out again."

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that's right. You did mention that.

Mr. Freemann:

She played music. We got a kick out of that. I'll tell you about one good thing I want to tell you. We went over an air field up near Hokaido, that's the most northern island, we were the first ones to hit there I understand, Air Group 6. One time I was coming back and the air field, I'm pretty low because I'm strafing too, so there was a school and all the kids, they're running out waving and waving, Japanese kids. They didn't even know we were there I guess. Of course I just flew by and kept going. Didn't do anything. It was just something that hit me, that here the kids are running out like with flags because I remember little Japanese flags waving. They thought we were the Japanese air force. That just stuck with me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's right. Did you get home with any souvenirs from World War II?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, I had my pistol but I lost it because one of the times I went down and I lost it but I had that but I lost it. But I had you know on your stick when you fly, the top of that where you press the trigger for your 20mms or the red button for the bomb, I had that off of one of the planes that went over the side. I got that and brought it back with me and I bought some teacups and an old drum, a decorated drum from Japan. I should have gotten a lot of other things. They had a lot of things in one department store that was still standing. Lot of people were buying cameras and things. I didn't buy anything like that. That's the only thing I got and that black handle, the trigger thing you know on the stick when you flew. You know Air Group, the Hancock has a room down on the Yorktown down in, where is it, North Carolina?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Somewhere over there, yes, one of the Carolinas.

Mr. Freemann:

The Yorktown. We have a room over there, the Hancock room. I just gave that piece of the stick to them and that's about all I ever had.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you shot down more than once?

Mr. Freemann:

No, I was shot down once but I was coming in for the carrier landing. They gave me a cut and the thing sputtered on me and I went off to the left side. I had the landing officer jump into his net, went into the water that way, right off the side.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But you and your gunner got out OK, huh?

Mr. Freemann:

The destroyer picked me up. I was under water for a while. That's the only two times I was in the drink.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Freemann:

No. Never.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Freemann:

I can't remember that. I was in Japan right after the war, we walked around and saw all the devastation. I got some pictures of all the devastation. Met some of the Japanese. I was on shore patrol for some of the geisha houses, they called them, and then they stopped the geisha houses and we were flyers and they gave us the job of shore patrol around the geisha houses.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go ashore in Japan?

Mr. Freemann:

I don't know that must have been. I got my logbook the last... On the 30th we flew over Tokyo and searched for the POWs which we found and dropped the bag so it must have been September.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you ashore there?

Mr. Freemann:

The carrier was off of there I guess for about a week.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you being shore patrol?

Mr. Freemann:

I'd say about, I can't remember, I'd say a few days. I know one time we walked around I got in trouble cause I didn't get back in time to get to the boat to get back to the carrier. I got the executive officer. I mean we gave them problems and he really ate us out for it so I wasn't allowed to go out into Japan any more.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What rank did you have at that point?

Mr. Freemann:

Lieutenant, j.g.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Freemann:

Oh, yes. We were out there then.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What reaction did people have when they heard that?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, we were sad. Let me see something. Yeah, April 6 we had a strike and April 16 they had a strike. So it was in between there we heard about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then on May 8, Germany surrendered. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes. I guess we were on our way out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This wasn't too long after Roosevelt died. About three weeks after Roosevelt died.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, I was back in May and I think according to my logbook you know, I think May 8 I was back at the rest camp on Oahu after we got hit. Yeah, that's where I was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when they dropped the first atomic bomb on August 6, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Freemann:

Oh, yes. We were out there and I think I told you on August 9. That's when they dropped the bomb on Nagasaki.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, right, August 9, you told me about that.

Mr. Freemann:

That's when they dropped the bomb on Nagasaki.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right, you were dropping a thousand pound bomb and they were dropping an A-bomb.

Mr. Freemann:

We didn't know about that until we got back. I didn't hear any noises...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Weren't that close.

Mr. Freemann:

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When were you discharged or released from active duty or whatever?

Mr. Freemann:

That must have been... I think it was January 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you stay in or not?

Mr. Freemann:

No. Glad I didn't. A couple of them stayed in and they were killed in Korea. We used to sing a song "We will all go USN" and then we'd say "The hell we will" or something like that. We didn't want to go. You know they'd try to get you not only in the reserve, wanted to go regular Navy, the reserves. I'd had enough.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many total missions did you fly?

Mr. Freemann:

It was about 25 or 26, somewhere in there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah, I guess I was drinking too much. Of course after the war we went back to college. We'd have one drawer full of empty bottles and one drawer full of full bottles. It's kind of rough that first year going back.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your G.I. Bill to go to college?

Mr. Freemann:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you go to college?

Mr. Freemann:

I told you I went to New Mexico Military before the war, then to Bucknell before the war and then I finished up at Bucknell University.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate there?

Mr. Freemann:

1948.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your major?

Mr. Freemann:

Commerce and finance, CNF. That's Campus and Frolic.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me again what NMI stands for.

Mr. Freemann:

Numerous Monkeys and Many Idiots.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Kind of hard to get back to studying.

Mr. Freemann:

One thing I want to say. You know I told you I had a brother who flew in the Navy. He died when he was 65 and he was in the war I told you on the Ranger aircraft carrier at Casablanca and other places in the Mediterranean. I just wanted, you know, his name was Richard Zern Freemann and I always looked up to him. He was about three years older than I was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Freemann:

Full Lieutenant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions since you've been out?

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah. With the Hancock and there were different Air Groups as I told you on the Hancock. They had some Air Group reunions and the biggest ones were on the Hancock and those were the only ones I went to. I must have been to about five or six of them. They had them all over. They had them in Atlantic City and Boston and Virginia Beach and down at Corpus and we had it in California, a couple of them, and Las Vegas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Freemann:

I got the Distinguished Flying Cross, about five Air Medals.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get any other medals?

Mr. Freemann:

Well, the Philippine...

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Philippine Liberation, OK.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, there's all kind of medals.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got the Asiatic-Pacific and the American Defense and the Victory Medal and all of that.

Mr. Freemann:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were some of your close calls?

Mr. Freemann:

You mean in combat. I told you I got shot down.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right, but I meant actually some sort of close call but didn't get shot down or whatever.

Mr. Freemann:

Well, some of the strikes I got hit, like my tires were blown out but I came back and I could land the plane right. I'd say about half of the strikes over Japan, maybe I said this before, I got hit by

anti-aircraft because I guess doing a lot of strafing and that was kind of close and I told you about the weather flights. That's about it. I told you about a landing I had in a cornfield down in Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, you did, right. Were you ever under friendly fire?

Mr. Freemann:

Not that close but I saw some of them that were. You know the fighters chasing the kamikazes and I saw one of them, I think he got shot down but he made a landing on the water. But the worst thing I saw, I told you I saw the Franklin when it got hit.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh yes, right. Did you ever see that sign Kilroy was here?

Mr. Freemann:

I don't remember seeing it over there. I knew all about it but I don't remember seeing it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, I think that's all the questions I have. Do you remember anything else from your time in the service?

Mr. Freemann:

No, but I think I met a lot of great people in the service. A lot of good friends and I'm glad I was in the service and I'm glad I could do what I could do to help.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your civilian career?

Mr. Freemann:

I was a manufacturer's rep basically, toys, hobbies and sporting goods. For a rep, one company

you'd remember, like hula hoops and Frisbees and all their TV items. I represent Monogram Models and they made models of all, even the Helldiver which I flew and Revell and some of the other glider companies. Paul K. Guillow and basically toy companies.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have much interaction with the ship's company?

Mr. Freemann:

No, that's the funny part.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you again for your time today and thank for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Freemann:

Thank you for your volunteering too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you, I appreciate that. All right.

End of Interview

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