

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

Erick Dan Nygaard

Homosassa, Florida

August 1st, 2012

USS Intrepid, Air Group 18, VF-18

USS Hancock, Air Group 7

USS Ticonderoga

Pilot F6F Hellcat

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is August the 1st, 2012. I am interviewing Mr. Erick Dan Nygaard by telephone. His phone number is 352-382-3150. His address is 95 Oak Village Boulevard South, Homosassa, Florida 34446. Mrs. Nygaard is assisting in this interview. 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.

Mr. Nygaard, 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. Nygaard:

It was my pleasure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure it's okay with you.

"Agreement Read."

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Nygaard:

That's fine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We like to get an alternative contact because sometimes several years down the road we try to call the veteran he's moved.

Your daughter Julie is the one who suggested we talk with you. Do you have her phone number?

Mr. Nygaard:

It's 312-218-8853. You could probably reach her in her office at 312-665-7911.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good. Hopefully we'll never need that, but we like to have an alternative just in case. Now, what is your birth date?

Mr. Nygaard:

7/16/22.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. Nygaard:

Brookhaven, Mississippi.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many of each?

Mr. Nygaard:

I had three brothers and one sister.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your brothers involved in World War II?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes, we were all involved.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are any of your brothers still living?

Mr. Nygaard:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If they were, I'd like to interview them. Was your sister involved in any kind of war work?

Mr. Nygaard:

I'm sure she was, but she's no longer here either.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, on December 7, '41 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes, I was in high school at the time. It was announced in the school and was quite a shock to everybody.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It happened on a Sunday afternoon, but on Monday most of the schools they got into an assembly and listened to President Roosevelt make his speech.

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that, how did you feel that would affect you?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, I was ready to go join up right away.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You would have been 19, 18 years old?

Mr. Nygaard:

18.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you graduate from high school?

Mr. Nygaard:

In 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you go in to the service?

Mr. Nygaard:

I went in in '42.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a date or a month?

Mr. Nygaard:

No, I don't. I could look it up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Would it have been in the spring, summer, fall?

Mr. Nygaard:

I remember hitchhiking down to New Orleans. I lived out in the country in Mississippi, but it had to be in... shortly right after Pearl Harbor. That was in '41, I'm sorry.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you went into the Navy, is that correct?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, I wanted to be a pilot, so I was successful in getting my wings of gold.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you take boot camp anywhere?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yeah, in Athens, Georgia at the University of Georgia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do there?

Mr. Nygaard:

Mostly athletics and calisthenics and all that sort of stuff. We studied naval history and that sort of thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have the *Blue Jackets' Manual*?

Mr. Nygaard:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you went in, did you go in as a cadet?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

After your boot camp there, then what happened?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, first of all I went in to what they call CPT, Civilian Pilot Training program. It was prior to going in to the cadet training program.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about the CPT.

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, that was to make sure you knew how to fly. It was civilian pilot training. They introduced you to the Piper Cub and you soloed in that and then you were sent home again and waited to be called into the regular Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you take your CPT at?

Mr. Nygaard:

Alexandria, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you soloed there, then.

Mr. Nygaard:

I flew there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how many hours of flight time did you have when you finished there?

Mr. Nygaard:

You didn't have to have very many. I think you had eight hours and then you were allowed to solo, and after that you were sent home again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when would you have been called to active duty?

Mr. Nygaard:

After finishing my flight training, I was sent to Hawaii and joined as a replacement pilot. As the carriers in the Pacific needed pilots they would draw from this group of people, which I was part of. I got called in to the *Intrepid*, first, and the *Hancock*, and the *Ticonderoga*. I was on three carriers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you take your Navy pilot training?

Mr. Nygaard:

Norman, Oklahoma and different satellite fields out at Corpus Christi.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's first? Primary first?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yeah. The CPT was first.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you take primary next or what do you take next?

Mr. Nygaard:

Primary in Norman, Oklahoma.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of plane did you fly there?

Mr. Nygaard:

I flew the N3N, a biplane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What they call the Steerman, in the Army, right?

Mr. Nygaard:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was it to fly that plane?

Mr. Nygaard:

It was a lot of fun to fly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything in particular happen during that training?

Mr. Nygaard:

No, not during that training. I did have an accident later on, much later on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

After you finished primary, where did you go?

Mr. Nygaard:

From there we went to Corpus Christi and I was on different satellite fields there, and then I graduated. Then I was sent home for an extended leave, and then they called us back, and I was sent to San Diego. Oh boy, now you're testing my memory.

Mr. Misenhimer:

There at Corpus Christi, what kind of plane did you fly there?

Mr. Nygaard:

SNJ.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's what the Army calls the AT-6.

Mr. Nygaard:

The AT-6, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever land at the auxiliary field in Alice?

Mr. Nygaard:

We landed on so many fields, I don't remember them all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They had six or eight around there, right.

Mr. Nygaard:

At Alice. Yes, I've been there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you get your commission?

About what date?

Mr. Nygaard:

I don't recall. It had to be some time in '44, my wife says.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Does she have a date for it?

Mr. Nygaard:

I don't have it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you went from there to Hawaii?

Mr. Nygaard:

I went out to San Francisco, I believe. Then I went to Hawaii from there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you travel to Hawaii?

Mr. Nygaard:

Aboard a freighter.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that trip over?

Mr. Nygaard:

I was seasick the whole time (laughing).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you leave from San Francisco?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand there are some big, bad swells when you leave San Francisco; it makes everybody seasick.

Mr. Nygaard:

Yeah, I'm telling you, I was never so sick in all of my life. I got seasick when I learned to fly and I thought well, I was over that, I won't get seasick anymore, but I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do when you got to Hawaii?

Mr. Nygaard:

We joined an auxiliary squadron, I guess for lack of a better word. That's where I had the accident. I had a wingman that was on my right side, just aft of my plane, and we had the option of moving to the other side if the sun got in your eyes and you couldn't stay on that side of the plane.

This fellow was Polish, and he decided he was going to go over the top of me instead of under me and keeping me in sight all the time. When he thought he was over on the other side, he let down right on top of me. Cut my plane right in half, almost. I had a piece of his prop lying in my lap that had hit the armor plating behind my cockpit and busted my head wide open. We were at high altitude and I came to about 500 feet off the water, but I was able to maneuver the plane. I had no rudder control, but I had up and down. I was able to land the plane in Hawaii. I was in the hospital there for a few weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you land on the land or in the water?

Mr. Nygaard:

I landed on land. I got back to Hawaii.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of plane were you in at that point?

Mr. Nygaard:

A Hellcat.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, the F6F.

Mr. Nygaard:

I got that date for you. February 9th, '44.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's when you were commissioned.

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what happened to the pilot that hit you? What happened to him?

Mr. Nygaard:

That's another story. I never saw him. He never came to see me in the hospital, I didn't know what happened to him. I thought they cashiered him out because it was such a stupid maneuver.

When I was discharged from the Navy after the war, I was walking coming from the barracks going somewhere, here comes this guy going in the opposite direction. I was ready to kill him. I had two buddies with me and they restrained me and wouldn't let me at him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

His plane did not crash, then.

Mr. Nygaard:

No, no. Well, when I landed, I landed in the proper manner – upwind – but as soon as I landed, my plane just buckled in half. I was sitting on the runway and all of the sudden I look up and here this jackass is coming at me landing downwind and almost hit me again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh man, I can see why you would want to work him over.(laughing)

Mr. Nygaard:

(laughing) Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

After you got out of the hospital there, then what happened?

Mr. Nygaard:

Then I was assigned to the *Independence*, which was a converted cruiser into a carrier.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's a CVL, right?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes, a CVL. You're smarter than the average bear. I served until 1955, and so I flew a few years after the war. After there was a couple of fellows got killed doing stupid things, and I could have been one of them so I said that's it, I'm going to resign my commission. I wouldn't fly anymore.

Things happen

Mr. Misenhimer:

The other guy's pilot error, right. Anyway, when you got on the *Independence*, what unit were you assigned to there?

Mr. Nygaard:

Fighter pilot.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What fighter group or what fighter squadron?

Mr. Nygaard:

There was a group, squadron, there, yes. I can't remember the name of it, but then I was transferred over to the *Intrepid*, which was Air Group 18, the Fighting 18.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were in VF-18, then, right?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes. We were kamikazed and went over the *Hancock* and that was Air Group 7, the Fighting 7, we were. That was also... well, we had a pilot that came in with a bomb that hadn't dropped, a torpedo plane, and it was hanging in the doors. They waved him off, but he didn't take the wave off and landed and blew up right there on the *Hancock*. Put us out of commission, too. That was a long time ago.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, how long were you on the *Independence*?

Mr. Nygaard:

Not very long, because we were sent out as replacement pilots and that was just a stepping stone.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was transportation, okay. Then you went from there to the *Intrepid*.

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your first combat mission?

Mr. Nygaard:

If I had my log book here, I could tell you that, but I don't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, roughly.

Mr. Nygaard:

They're down in my trunk somewhere. I don't know. It was probably in the Philippines. I remember dive-bombing the Japanese fleet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you join the *Hancock*?

Mr. Nygaard:

In the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you remember what island or where?

Mr. Nygaard:

Ulithi.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your first action in the Philippines?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, we ran in to Zeros that were... Japanese planes that were – we would intercept them. I don't know where the hell they were going, now, I can't remember now. Of course, we did do the bombing in the Philippines. That's when Douglas MacArthur said he wanted us to – we had to land for fuel there and he wanted to keep us. He said, "You can stay here." He radioed Nimitz and said he wanted us to stay there. Nimitz sent one word back, "Negative."

Mr. Misenhimer:

You say you remember bombing a Japanese ship there?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, it was in the harbor in the Philippines, a battleship. It had a lot of firepower. I guess there were several carriers involved on our side and we were targeted on it. We were sent out to go after this battleship, so we dropped bombs on it and strafed it. Of course, fighters didn't have a lot of bombs, but we had rockets and those we fired at it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were there other planes such as SBDs or SB2Cs also bombing at the same time?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes, yes there were. TBFs.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you able to damage the ship or sink it?

Mr. Nygaard:

Oh it sank.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Nygaard:

Went back and waited for some more targets.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were some other targets that you had?

Mr. Nygaard:

I'm having a rough time remembering, but I think it was a lot of land-based targets there in the Philippines. Clark Field stands out in my mind and we were on our way up to Japan and we were hitting the little islands all the way up from the Philippines going toward Japan. I don't remember the names of them now. That's what we did. Before we got to Japan, we were sent back and shortly thereafter they surrendered, I guess, they dropped the bomb then they surrendered.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Going back to the Philippines, October the 23rd of '44 was what they called the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Were you all involved in that at all?

Mr. Nygaard:

I might have been, but I can't recall.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They also call it the Battle off Samar.

Mr. Nygaard:

I probably was. What year was that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

October of '44. That's when they landed on Leyte and started to take back the Philippines.

Mr. Nygaard:

You know, I can't recall.

I was overseas in 1944, October.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What fleet were you with? The 3rd Fleet? The 5th Fleet?

Mr. Nygaard:

I was in Halsey's fleet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, that's the 3rd Fleet.

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When he went up north chasing the Japanese aircraft carriers, did you go with him on that trip?

Mr. Nygaard:

I could have been, I don't recall. I'm sure I must have been.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was in October of '44.

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were some other actions you had?

Mr. Nygaard:

I don't recall. It's been a long time ago.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I understand.

Mr. Nygaard:

We were in the typhoon of 1944 that sunk a lot of ships. It was more damaging and Halsey decided he's going to sail right through the heart of the typhoon, which was a dumb, dumb, dumb maneuver on his part.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of Halsey?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, he was a pompous ass, but I guess he was a good warrior, but he wasn't the kind of guy you'd like to have on your side, I don't think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever meet him?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the occasion when you met him?

Mr. Nygaard:

Like I said, he just struck me as a pompous ass. We had Admiral McCain. He had a son that became famous as a politician. Anyway, he was our commanding officer, Admiral McCain. He would, after you came back from a battle, he'd interview you. The first thing he'd always say,

he'd ask any pilot did he burn some? (laughing) He always wanted to know that, did he "burn some?"

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your worst mission?

Mr. Nygaard:

I guess the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's where you all went at night trying to come back in late?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes. We lost a lot of pilots.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's when Admiral Mitscher turned on the lights so they could find the carriers coming back.

Mr. Nygaard:

Right, exactly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that battle then.

Mr. Nygaard:

We were mostly dive-bombing ships and stuff like that. The Japanese planes, at that time, were kamikaze pilots, basically. They were just trained enough to go out and find a ship to crash in to. They weren't trained to be pilots as such and go in to dog-fighting and that sort of thing. They were easy enough to dispatch.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many planes did you shoot down?

Mr. Nygaard:

I shot down one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, not much to tell. We were on a mission and we were four planes, and we had a guy who was chickenshit and after we took off, he said he had plane trouble and he had to go back to land so we were three planes against – encountered eight Japanese planes. We shot them all down. I got one of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of Japanese planes were these?

Mr. Nygaard:

Zeroes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They were not the kamikazes.

Mr. Nygaard:

They probably were trained to be kamikazes, but I don't know what they were doing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many total missions did you fly?

Mr. Nygaard:

I don't know. We didn't count them as such, you know. They finally said you flew so many missions. Every time you took off from the aircraft carrier you were on a mission, so we flew off the carrier every day. I don't know how many missions you'd call it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you still on the *Hancock* at this point?

Mr. Nygaard:

I'm trying to recall if I was on the *Hancock* first or the *Intrepid* first. I know I was... when I came home, I came home on the *Ticonderoga*.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You say the *Hancock* was hit by a kamikaze?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes, it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you aboard it when that happened?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, we had just come back from a flight, a very close friend and I, and we were up on the *fo'c'sle* playing acey-ducey, do you know what that game is?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've heard of it, but I've never played it. I've heard of it.

Mr. Nygaard:

Anyway, we were up playing that, and all the sudden General Quarters was sounded. We just – what could we do, you know? We just got down under the table. The kamikaze hit the ship. We went up to see what we could help – he had hit the deck, the momentum had knocked him out of the cockpit and he was laying right at the bow of the ship, the Japanese pilot. Some of the sailors were up there taking souvenirs such taking a finger off or something like that. We made ourselves guardian until they removed the body, we stopped that monkey business.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How much damage did it do to the ship?

Mr. Nygaard:

It knocked a hole in the deck and went down in to the hangar deck and the engine of the plane was down in the hangar deck. Beyond that, he didn't hurt us much. We still had room to land and take off.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You didn't have to go back to port for repairs, then.

Mr. Nygaard:

Oh yes, we did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to?

Mr. Nygaard:

We went back in to Hawaii, I guess. Then we picked up another ship and we went back out again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ship was that?

Mr. Nygaard:

That was the *Intrepid*. The *Ticonderoga* came last, I know that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do on that, then?

Mr. Nygaard:

The same as we had been doing before. Patrolling and getting closer in to Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What Air Group were you on there?

Mr. Nygaard:

18, I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You mentioned earlier that Air Group 18 was on the *Intrepid*.

Mr. Nygaard:

I was in Air Group 7 and Air Group 18 and 100. I don't remember in what order.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you recall what all you did while you were on the *Ticonderoga*?

Mr. Nygaard:

We talked about where the pilot came in and had a bomb hanging. That wasn't the *Ticonderoga*, I think that was the *Hancock*. I can't remember anything on the *Ticonderoga*. I know we sailed home on the *Ticonderoga* and that it had some mishap, and I can't remember what it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I don't recall either. What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Nygaard:

Every time I got in the cockpit (laughing). No, not really, but I guess whenever you contacted the enemy it was scary. When they were shooting at you, that's not the most pleasant thing to have happening.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have many dog-fights with enemy planes?

Mr. Nygaard:

I had one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did your Air Group lose many planes and pilots?

Mr. Nygaard:

Oh yes, yes we lost a lot. I have a yearbook here that shows the group that went out and the group that came back. The one's a whole page full, the other's only seven or eight guys.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ship was that?

Mr. Nygaard:

We were on both the *Hancock*, the *Ticonderoga* and the *Intrepid*. They kept moving the squadron from one ship to another.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So that's all the ships then, right. Did you all ever attack Iwo Jima?

Mr. Nygaard:

No, I don't think I ever got that far.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about Okinawa?

Mr. Nygaard:

Oh yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What happened there?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, it was just a lot of anti-aircraft fire, we would just sit there, the fighter planes carried two bombs and as soon as we dropped those, then we were back in fighter plane mode again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okinawa was where the kamikazes were so bad.

Mr. Nygaard:

They were bad wherever you ran in to one (laughing). They had no fear. They would just fly right in to the ships.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What I mean . . . Okinawa is where there were so many of them, that's where they really concentrated, in Okinawa.

Mr. Nygaard:

I don't recall there was any more of them there than there was anywhere else.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What are some other things that happened?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, I can think of some pleasant things.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go ahead.

Mr. Nygaard:

I was stationed in Hawaii and I had this midair collision that I told you about earlier, and I was in the hospital and all of the sudden my brother shows up there. He was in the Seabees and he was stationed in Hawaii and found out I was there. Of course, in those days you couldn't tell anybody where you were. Somehow or another I had gotten the word to my mother that I was in Hawaii.

My wife is sitting here saying no. Anyway, I ran in to my brother in Hawaii.

I had a kindergarten teacher who retired to Hawaii. Of course we knew that. She was our favorite teacher, both my brother and I just loved her. Anyway, when I got to Hawaii, I knew she was there so I looked her up. She said, "Have you seen your brother?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, he's here." (laughing) So, she got word to him and we got together.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What are some other pleasant things that happened?

Mr. Nygaard:

I can't recall any.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in Hawaii, was there still much damage left from the December 7th attack?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yeah, those ships, of course, were all sunk and laying in the harbor there. In fact, there are still museums there, I guess they're still there today, and you can take a boat out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

To the *Arizona*, right.

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been back since the war?

Mr. Nygaard:

No, I haven't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Nygaard:

I can't recall too many things right now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me ask you some questions. On April the 12th of 1945, President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes. I was home on leave at the time. I was driving – I remember it to this day – we were stationed in Florida and we were transferred up to New Jersey or something like that. We were driving up to our new station when he died. I heard it on the radio in the car.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the reaction people had when they heard that?

Mr. Nygaard:

It was – everybody was sad. He was a well respected man.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you come home from overseas then?

Mr. Nygaard:

I was overseas for eight months. I guess it was still in '44 when I came back. My wife says '45.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, May the 8th of '45, Germany surrendered. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes. Yes. We were home here then. There was a big party at the O Club.

Mr. Misenhimer:

For the Germany surrendered I'm talking about, right. Now on August the 6th they dropped the first atomic bomb. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the reaction when you heard that?

Mr. Nygaard:

Mixed feelings, but we were glad. But in retrospect, I sometimes wonder if it was the smartest thing we ever did, but I guess it saved a lot of lives. They were tenacious little sons of bitches, pardon my French. They would never give up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's right. Then when Japan did surrender, did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Nygaard:

Oh yes. We certainly did. I was stationed down in Key West, Florida at the time being trained to go out as night fighters. We just went home and celebrated.

Mr. Misenhimer:

To be a night fighter, was that still in the F6F, the Hellcat?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you finally get out of active duty?

Mr. Nygaard:

When the war was over, we just went home and got out... didn't get out of the Navy, I stayed in the Reserve until 1955, and that's when I finally decided I'd had enough.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you stayed in the Reserve, was that the active Reserve or the inactive?

Mr. Nygaard:

Active Reserve.

We were weekend warriors.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you start doing that?

Mr. Nygaard:

Immediately after the war. We didn't – we weren't trained in any job activity or anything. The only training we had was to know how to fly, but anyway, we would – I was stationed in – lived in Chicago and we went out to Glenview, the Naval Air Station there. We flew out there on weekends. We got paid for that. That was part of my pay in those days until I finally found a job.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you working when you lived in Chicago? What were you doing there?

Mr. Nygaard:

I was a printer. My father-in-law was a printer and he and I formed a partnership. He was a typesetter and I was a printer.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you start doing that?

Mr. Nygaard:

I did until I retired.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You lived in Chicago all that time?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What part of Chicago did you live in?

Mr. Nygaard:

We lived in Des Plaines, basically, most of the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Nygaard:

No, no I didn't. I just – until I got into business with my father-in-law, I tried other little jobs and none of them seemed to work out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Nygaard:

I went to school for one semester only.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was that at?

Mr. Nygaard:

That was a junior college in Chicago Wright Junior College.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows when you were in the service?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yeah, we had – they came to the ship, especially during the holiday time, and they had some very good shows. We didn't get to see them that often, but we did see a couple of them, anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any big names?

Mr. Nygaard:

Bob Hope, of course.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was he?

Mr. Nygaard:

He was very entertaining, very entertaining. He was a serviceman's entertainer, really.

Everybody knew him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He worked hard for it, right. When you were on those ships, how was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Nygaard:

We had good morale. Very good morale.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes, I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was that?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, I was stationed down in Corpus Christi and my father became very ill, seriously ill, and I had to come home. They arranged for me to come home. Then I stayed – I don't know how many days leave I had, but I went back and when he died I had to go back again, they arranged for that, as well. Then when I got to my next duty station, I was on report for being absent without leave. The Red Cross didn't come to bat for me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you work that out?

Mr. Nygaard:

I had to stand duty for about two weeks. Sitting out on the end of a runway with an Aldis lamp. When the planes come in to land, you give them a green light or a red light.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Nygaard:

No, I don't think so. I may have some. I think I did bring home something, but I can't remember what it was. Oh, I brought a carbine home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you still have it?

Mr. Nygaard:

I gave it to my son. It's still in the family.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Nygaard:

Oh yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of her?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, she was pretty smart (laughing). The stuff she came up with was not factual. We sort of laughed at her.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you cross the equator?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any kind of a ceremony when you did?

Mr. Nygaard:

Oh yes. I had – before you went in you were ‘pollywog’ and after you went through the ceremony, you became a ‘shellback.’ Are you familiar with those terms?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir, I am.

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, then you know what it’s all about.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did they do to you?

Mr. Nygaard:

They had canvas shillelaghs, for lack of a better word, a canvas sleeve filled with cotton and soaked in water. You had to run a gauntlet. These sailors, they loved to beat up on the officers

(laughing), and you had to go through this gauntlet. Those guys would hit you with those shillelaghs. They just kept after you. They had a pool they built on the deck, it was just a canvas structure filled with water, it was about fifteen feet in diameter and eight feet of water. The last thing they did was throw you in that pool and then there was a couple of professional swimmers there. Every time you'd come up, they'd dunk you again. They kept doing that and then they asked you what you were. They'd been asking you all the time what you are and well, you're a pollywog, you're a pollywog. Well, at that point in time, you became a shellback, so you were supposed to say "shellback." Until you got the picture, they just kept dunking you and dunking you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. Nygaard:

I thought they were... well, that's a long story (laughing).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go ahead, tell it.

Mr. Nygaard:

I had a commander, when I was in pre-flight, he was a commander of the whole unit in Norman, Oklahoma. I got to know an Admiral's daughter there. She and I were pretty close. So, having the rank of Admiral, he outranked our commanding officer there, so he'd give me leave and stuff over this commanding officer, and let me have a car and things like that. That just galled the hell out of this Commander Check (laughing) There was nothing he could do about it. Anyway, then we graduated from there and I went on out to overseas. Guess who was my commanding officer? Commander Check. I got every bad detail there was that he could hand out. I'd only been out there a couple of weeks and he and his wingman had a midair collision and he was killed. I was sorry to hear that, of course, but at least he didn't bother me anymore.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you think most of the upper officers knew their job?

Mr. Nygaard:

I think so, yeah, I think so. They all had good training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, could you see many changes in this country?

Mr. Nygaard:

Oh yes, of course. I was a farm boy when I went in, and became an officer, a pilot, and it was altogether different when I got out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Nygaard:

I was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross, but I never got it because I was transferred out of that unit, so it didn't follow me. I've got Air Medals and Presidential Unit Citations up the yinyang.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many Air Medals did you get?

Mr. Nygaard:

I think I got three.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Nygaard:

I did. I joined the Reserve when I got out and flew out of Glenview, Illinois until 1955, and we had a squadron there. We always had reunions, but as far as reunions with my group overseas, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But they did have reunions, though, right?

Mr. Nygaard:

I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You didn't hear of them, okay. Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, I met my wife.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, I was up in Chicago, and they had a – there at the Conrad Hilton Hotel, “Opera Singer Lawrence Melchior.” Do you remember that name at all?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes sir, I sure do.

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, he was a star there. I'm a Dane and he's a Dane so all the Danes had to go to that affair.

That's how I met my wife. I was introduced to her and my fate was sealed right there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many years have you been married now?

Mr. Nygaard:

That was in '44. You do the math.

Mr. Misenhimer:

(laughing) Okay, a long time. Well, my wife and I will have our 57th here in August.

Mr. Nygaard:

Well, congratulations.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you, and congratulations to you. Well, 11 years, so yours will be 68, I guess, then.

Mr. Nygaard:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Nygaard:

Commander. Lt. Commander.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you got that in the Reserves?

Mr. Nygaard:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else?

Mr. Nygaard:

Not that I want to tell you about, anyway (laughing).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go ahead, tell me about them.

Mr. Nygaard:

No, there's nothing else I can tell. A couple of friends that were with me on one – from the day I got in until the day I discharged. That was good to have.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you keep up with them after the war?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yeah. They're all dead now.

Guess what I did?

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's that?

Mr. Nygaard:

I resigned my commission.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And that's when the Korean War came along, huh?

Mr. Nygaard:

All my squadron, I flew on the weekends, they all went. I wasn't going to go back over there and do that again. I had four children at that time, and I said no way.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On Guadalcanal, what did you do there?

Mr. Nygaard:

We were just aboard ship there and just flying patrols, that's all. That's the biggest – during World War II, that was the biggest recreation spot for the military in the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Didn't they have a place called MogMog there?

Mr. Nygaard:

Yeah. Eggnog and MogMog.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that?

Mr. Nygaard:

That was pretty good. That was pretty good. It was funny. You could go ashore in the morning and you could drink beer until two o'clock in the afternoon. From two 'til five when they took

you back to the ship you could drink hard liquor. You talk about some drunk sailors and flyboys. You know, you had to climb aboard, to get on the carrier you had to go up a Jacob's ladder. Often times there would be the guy at the top would slip and fall and knock about three more right into the drink.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've heard quite a bit about MogMog.

Well, Mr. Nygaard, anything else you've thought of?

Mr. Nygaard:

No, you can call me Dan.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Dan, okay, I go by Richard.

Mr. Nygaard:

It's nice talking to you, and I wish you the best of luck.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you. Thank you for your time, again, today and your service to our country.

Mr. Nygaard:

Okay, thank you.

Transcribed by:

Kara Thorpe

Houston, TX

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Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer

P.O. Box 3453

Alice, TX 78333

Home: (361) 664-4071

Cell (361) 701-5848