Admiral Nimitz Foundation

and

University of North Texas

Zenji Abe

Interviewers: Richarch Byrd
John Daniels

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Place of Interview: Fredericksburg, Texas

Mr. Byrd: This is Richard Byrd, accompanied by John Daniels, interviewing Mr. Zenji Abe for the Admiral Nimitz Museum and the University of North Texas Oral History Program. We are interviewing Mr. Abe in order to obtain his recollections of war in the Pacific during the Second World War. The interview is taking place on May 1, 1993, in Fredericksburg, Texas.

Mr. Abe, could you tell us a little about your background? Where you were born and when?

Mr. Abe: I was born in the most western portion of Honshu, Japan, on the 18th of August, 1916.

Mr. Byrd: Did you attend schools in that area, or did you attend school elsewhere when you were growing up?

Mr. Abe: I entered school for six years. After primary school for six years in my native town, I entered into the middle school in Yamaguchi City. Yamaguchi City is

the capital of Yamaguchi Prefecture, the most western portion of Honshu. It was the number one middle school at that time. Many prime ministers of Japan had gone to that middle school. After graduating from the primary school after six years in my native town, I entered the middle school, and I studied for four years. Most studied five or six years in middle school before entering the Naval Academy, but I entered after four years study at middle school. That was in 1933.

Byrd: Where is the Naval Academy located?

Abe: It is located in Hiroshima Prefecture on the Inland Sea. We call it Seto Naikai.

Byrd: Is the town of Hiroshima in Hiroshima Prefecture?

Abe: Next to Yamaguchi. Originally, the Naval Academy was located very close to Tokyo, but the Minister of the Navy chose a very small rural area, separated from the crowded centers, in order to educate young naval officers.

Byrd: How long were you in the Naval Academy?

Abe: Four years. I entered on the 1st of April, 1933, and graduated in 1937.

Byrd: What was your first assignment after you finished your study at the Naval Academy?

Abe: We had sea training. We served in a training squadron through Europe. We visited the Mediterranean countries. We graduated in late March, 1937, and the

training squadron was on board the Iwate, an old battleship. We traveled to the Sea of Japan, Korea, Mukden, Shanghai, and Formosa. Once we came back to Japan to meet the emperor.

Byrd: I'll bet that was a treat, to meet the emperor.

Abe: Yes. Then we sailed out toward Europe. We were cruising in the Indian Ocean toward the west when the incident happened in China on the 7th of July, 1937.

Byrd: That's when the invasion took place?

Abe: Yes. That was the beginning of that war. We visited Singapore--I don't exactly remember now--Bombay, Colombo. Then we went to Aden at the northeastern end of Africa, at the entrance to the Red Sea. We went through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal and then into the Mediterranean Sea. We visited Cairo, Greece, Turkey, Italy, and Marseille, France. We took a trip to Paris, and we stayed a week. Half of us went. We graduated together--160 cadets--from the Naval Academy in 1937. We were assigned as midshipmen. After we came back from the training squadron in the autumn, perhaps in October, we entered Yokosuka, and all together we went to Kasumiga-ura--air training school.

Daniels: Where is Yokosuka?

Abe: Yokosuka was our most important naval port, south of Tokyo.

Byrd: South of Tokyo?

Abe: In the beginning of the Meiji Era, the Naval Academy was established maybe eighty or ninety years ago in Tokyo. But the Naval Academy is right here [points to map]--a very small island, isolated.

Byrd: So, the academy was on an island?

Abe: Right here, called Eta Jima. Jima means island. It was a small island, isolated from a big population, away from civilization.

Daniels: This is the biggest naval base?

Abe: No, it is a school. Yokosuka was the main port at that time. Kure is here. Sasebo in Hyushu is here, and this is where the Yamato--the biggest warship--was built.

Byrd: You said you started training to fly?

Abe: One hundred sixty, all total, entered the Kasumiga-ura Air Training School. We studied and flew. Another important mission of that school was the selection and testing of air crews. It was a very difficult process. Naval Headquarters employed very, very special technicians who made the decision on who would be a pilot. During one month, the headquarters of the school selected from the 160 candidates those who would be navigator of a seaplane or pilot of a bomber or fighter on the aircraft carrier, or would fly the twin-engine bombers on land. Then we were assigned.

Daniels: When, in your case, did this all happen?

Abe: Right after coming back from the training cruise to Europe, we entered the school.

Byrd: So this is 1937 or 1938?

Abe: In 1933, I entered the Naval Academy, and in March, 1937, I graduated. We came back from Europe in October of 1937 and entered flight school. We studied, trained, and went through selection for several months. Then ten midshipmen went to a battleship, maybe the Nagato; ten of them maybe went to the Mutsu; eight or ten went to the heavy cruiser Atago; ten went to the aircraft carrier Akagi. Only ten had their first assignment on an aircraft carrier. We were promoted to ensign in March of 1938.

Daniels: How much flight training did you actually have before you were assigned to a ship?

Abe: We spent the whole four years in the Naval Academy, then in the training squadron after graduating, until we entered flying school.

Daniels: When did they start to train you to fly?

Abe: Later on, later on. It takes time. Some went into navigation; some went into gunnery; some assisted the torpedo officer.

Byrd: So, you got a little training in all departments?

Abe: Yes. It was a big ship: aircraft carrier, battleship, or cruiser.

Byrd: So, they're grooming these men to take higher command?

Abe: Yes, that's right.

Daniels: This is all book learning?

Abe: No, no, no.

Byrd: You could be assigned in the gunnery section for a while, the navigation section for a while.

Abe: Yes.

Daniels: So, if you're not in a plane, how do you practice navigation?

Byrd: Navigating a ship.

Daniels: You're talking about plane navigation or ship navigation?

Abe: No, ship navigation. No air crews, not yet.

Daniels: Up until this point, they are still teaching you everything?

Abe: That's right.

Daniels: Everyone who goes to the ship has to learn all the different specialties?

Abe: The object of the Naval Academy was to train the main body of Imperial Japanese Navy. Some will be gunnery officers; some will be navigators; some will be torpedo officers; and some will become captains of the warships or cruisers.

Byrd: If you're going to move up to captain, you've got to know a little bit about all that?

Abe: Yes. We were promoted to ensign from midshipman in March of 1938. My first assignment was on a new

cruiser, called the Kumano, with the other seven classmates. In April, one month after being promoted ensign, I was transferred to a destroyer.

Daniels: What was the name of the destroyer that you were assigned to?

Abe: Uzuki. My assignments on the destroyer were assistant to the navigator and assistant to the communications officer.

Daniels: Then where?

Abe: Then in August of that year, I was assigned to air school, again Kasumiga-ura.

Daniels: Where was the air school?

Abe: Kasumiga-ura, the same school, maybe one hour and a half from Tokyo, north. It was the biggest school to produce air crews for the Imperial Navy.

Byrd: What did they train you to fly? What kind of plane?

Abe: Some trainees came from battleships, some from cruisers, some from aircraft carriers. With me, they entered the school. About thirty or forty of them trained for the seaplane.

Byrd: Seaplane?

Abe: Seaplane, with floats, operating off battleships, cruisers, or big submarines.

Byrd: They used that for reconnaissance?

Abe: Yes, reconnaissance. They were launched by catapult.

Byrd: You landed in the water, and they picked you up with a

crane and set you back on the ship.

Abe: That's right. Thirty more were trained for fighters and dive-bombers and Kates [American code name for the Japanese torpedo bomber, Nakajima 97]. Training was done separately and lasted about four months at Kasumiga-ura. After four months of the course of just basic training on the aircraft, I was assigned to be the pilot of two-seat dive-bomber. Others became fighter pilots. Ten of my classmates were assigned to be pilots of fighters based on carriers. Only four were assigned as pilots of dive-bombers based on aircraft carriers. Ten were assigned to the three-seat plane called the Kate, which was used for torpedo attacks. Ten would be the navigators of aircraft based on carriers. I was one of the four pilots of the two-seat dive-bomber.

Byrd: What ship were you based on?

Abe: After we finished the training course, then I went to Kyushu for special training for pilots of dive-bombers at the Omura Air Base. I received special training for the dive-bomber, maybe four or five months. Then I became an independent pilot.

Byrd: You got your wings?

Abe: Yes, although we did not have any wing insignia. Then I was promoted from ensign to lieutenant junior grade and assigned to Saeki Air Base.

Byrd: Is that on Kyushu, too?

Abe: Yes, Kyushu. Then the first aircraft carrier I boarded was the Soryu. I went on board in October of 1940. That was the first aircraft assignment for me. In April of the following year, 1941, I transferred from Soryu to Akagi as squadron leader of the 2nd Squadron of dive-bombers. I was promoted to lieutenant senior grade.

Byrd: Did you men have any special training for the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Abe: Oh, yes; oh, yes!

Byrd: Did you train at sea or in the home waters? Where did you train for that?

Abe: Mainly based on the naval air base in Kyushu.

Byrd: At that same base in Kyushu where you had done your advanced training as a dive-bomber pilot?

Abe: Yes. Naval headquarters decided on the idea for the Pearl Harbor attack, so it organized the 1st Air Fleet. Until that time, the usage of the aircraft carrier commonly involved one or two aircraft carriers, plus one or two destroyers. The 1st Air Squadron included Akagi and the Kaga. The 1st Combined Air Fleet was used in the Pearl Harbor operation. All the same type of aircraft operated together.

Byrd: Dive-bombers with dive-bombers, torpedo planes with torpedo planes?

Abe: Yes. All dive-bombers from Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu, trained here and here [points to map]. All Kates assembled at this base. Torpedo attack craft assembled at Kagoshima.

Byrd: When you were preparing for the Pearl Harbor mission, what did you use for targets?

Abe: Usually, it was a painted target or a big rock on the coast. We trained on the east coast of Kyushu. The torpedo planes trained at Kagoshima, and the fighters trained at Oita. Dive-bombers trained right here [points to map].

Byrd: So, then the three wings trained in three different areas?

Abe: Yes, by the kind of aircraft.

Byrd: Was that also for security reasons so that nobody would know what the others were doing?

Abe: It was not for security. We trained for the massed use of these planes. In ship battles, always the champion was the battleship--the big gun. That was the idea of the old Imperial Japanese Navy--the big ships. But this time, Isoroku Yamamoto thought, in order to fight with America, we had to attack at first by massed power of aircraft carriers and planes, so we massed our aircraft and assembled the same types of aircraft from the four carriers.

Byrd: So, you folks were training a year or so in advance for

this?

Abe: We trained on the Soryu for half a year, while I was assigned there from October of 1940 until I was transferred to Akagi in April of 1941. Usually, the Imperial Navy, in late October or November, rotated personnel. From December to March or April was the first step of training for many freshman pilots. Do you understand what I mean?

Byrd: Yes, sir, a new group coming in.

Abe: Then in the autumn the skill level of the Combined Fleet would be at its peak. In October, the personnel rotation would lower the skill level.

Byrd: So, they kept the same group in place in that October?

Abe: In October, 1940, for aircraft carrier crews, we did not have a big rotation.

Byrd: So, from October, 1940, the crews were established; there was nobody rotating in or out?

Abe: True. We trained over a year.

Byrd: So, you got your best group--your most efficient group?

Abe: Skill reached its highest level.

Byrd: What was your first indication that the attack at Pearl Harbor was imminent?

Abe: More than eighty Vals [American code name for the Japanese dive-bomber Aichi D3A2] from Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu, made up a task force group and were very skillful. We made up the second wave, intended to hit

Lexington, Enterprise--the U.S. aircraft carriers. But we could not find them, so the order was to attack battleships and cruisers alongside Ford Island. The torpedo bomber attack of the first wave was supposed to crush most of the main ships, but headquarters of the Japanese task force couldn't estimate exactly how big the damage had been, so they used the second wave dive-bombers to finish the job.

Byrd: What kind of planes were you flying on that second wave? Were they Kates?

Abe: Kates were the [high] level bombers. Forty or fifty of the second wave level bombers came from Shokaku and Zuikaku. Those two aircraft carriers were built very late, just one or two months prior to the Pearl Harbor attacks. The air crews were also organized very late. They did not have enough time to train for Pearl Harbor, so their target was always on land. Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu, the air crews of those four aircraft carriers, was trained more than one year. Their skill level was at the utmost, so our target was always ships.

Byrd: The big ships?

Abe: Big ships, especially dive-bombers of the second wave that I belonged to. We had aircraft carriers as targets.

Byrd: So, your group was supposed to hit the carriers? The

first wave was supposed to hit the battleships, and the second group was to hit the aircraft carriers? That was the design?

Abe: Yes.

Byrd: What did you think when you didn't see the carriers? How did you make the decision to go after secondary targets?

Abe: We didn't find the American aircraft carriers, so headquarters gave us the same target.

Daniels: Hit the battleships again?

Abe: Yes. Maybe the torpedo attack by the first wave or level bombers of the first wave would crush most of the targets, but headquarters couldn't estimate exactly the damage done by the first wave, so the eighty dive-bomber groups of the second wave was ordered to hit the same targets.

Daniels: What were you flying? What plane?

Abe: Dive-bomber. I was the squadron leader of the squadron of dive-bombers of the second wave. The second wave totaled 170 airplanes and attacked one hour later than the first wave.

Byrd: So, there was only one kind of dive-bomber then? You only had one kind of dive-bomber?

Abe: One kind, 99-Type dive-bomber.

Byrd: Was that an easy plane to fly?

Abe: Oh, yes. Maybe in 1939 the 99-Type dive-bomber

appeared. We were very familiar with both the flying, the mechanics, and the ordnance of it.

Byrd: I'm going to take a minute here to flip this tape over.

[Tape 1, Side 2]

Byrd: You're looking at that painting of Battleship Row there? You say that's looking from the submarine base?

Abe: Yes.

Byrd: And that's in Hamilton's War at Sea, 1939-1945?

Daniels: That picture is supposed to show planes attacking hangars on Ford Island, and it is supposed to be Commander Fuchida's plane going over the hangar.

Byrd: You said you were using a Type-99? Did you have special equipment, specially-designed bombs, on that aircraft?

Abe: Not specially-designed bombs. Dive-bombers had no special program for training or armaments. The torpedo attackers had a lot of problems because Pearl Harbor is very shallow. The depth was about twelve meters, so the torpedo would stick in mud. As far as the dive-bombers, we only had one thing that was special. Before that attack, we usually entered our dive about 4,000 meters high. We sighted the target, then went through a steep dive at about fifty-five to sixty degrees. At 800 meters, we released the bomb. But, with training every day--every day training, training, training--in order to hit more targets, we descended in

our dive to 600 meters instead of 800 meters.

Byrd: So, you got even closer when you were over the target?

Abe: Yes. Then, maybe two or three months later on, we descended to 400 meters for Pearl Harbor.

Byrd: So, you were down to 400 meters at Pearl Harbor when you released the bombs?

Abe: Yes. The plane went down maybe 150 or 160 meters per second in diving. The pilot was aiming through the bombsight, and the navigator was reading the altimeter: "1,000 meters! 800 meters! 600 meters! Ready! Release!" We released at 400 meters. Then the pilot pulled back on the stick, but at that very moment the pilot lost sight because of the G-forces. He continues down until he recovers the horizontal position.

Byrd: Gets his horizontal control back?

Abe: He continues down until maybe 40 or 50 meters above the sea level.

Byrd: You're getting in awful close to fire, two kinds of fire.

Daniels: Did your plane personally hit anything, or could you tell?

Abe: I got down very close, only 400 meters: "Must hit target!" Sometimes I was only 200 meters above the ships.

Daniels: So, what did you hit? What did your plane hit?

Abe: My remembrance is that we left our aircraft carrier 200

miles from Oahu. After the first wave came over, all the island was covered with smoke, shrouded, and we couldn't see. Then we came over Diamond Head. I led my squadron and was trying to find my target. What target should be mine? I led my squadron this way from this direction. The torpedo planes of the first wave attacked this way (gestures). The battleships on the Ford Island side could not be attacked by torpedo planes from the inboard side. Do you understand what I mean?

Daniels: You're coming in from the southeast?

Abe: Japanese headquarters did not have confidence in the damage done by bombing, but they did have confidence in torpedos. The outside ships could be damaged by torpedo attack. So, I thought one thing: "I must attack the Ford Island side of the targets!" So, I went for the second one from the right side.

Daniels: So, you hit the Arizona?

Abe: Arizona, I remember. But historians say that when I, Mr. Abe, attacked Pearl Harbor, the Arizona was already out.

Daniels: It's already on the bottom?

Abe: Yes.

Daniels: You must have hit the next one?

Abe: It must be this one (gesture).

Daniels: You must have hit the Tennessee? You hit the one on

the inside?

Abe: I don't know. It was fifty-two years ago. My target was the second one from the right, on the Ford Island side. When I first read At Dawn We Slept by Gordon Prange, I realized that my target must have been the Arizona.

Daniels: You must have hit the Tennessee.

Abe: Yes, yes. Now I think that.

Daniels: The Arizona was already gone.

Byrd: That went down in the first wave.

Daniels: It was already sitting on the bottom.

Byrd: When you discussed the second wave, you said the ships were steaming in from the north headed toward Oahu. Were they still steaming toward Oahu when the second wave left, or were they dead in the water, or had they already turned by the time your flight was launched?

Abe: I don't know exactly how far out we were. After the first wave took off, the return of the aircraft after the attack was maybe five or six hours. Around 200 miles north of Oahu, we launched.

Byrd: So, your wave was launched before the first wave got back? The second wave was launched before the first wave got back.

Abe: When we took off, the wind direction was not exactly toward the takeoff. During a takeoff, the carrier must run toward the wind.

Byrd: Yes, to give you enough lift to get airborne.

Abe: Yes.

Byrd: In some of the reading, there is always the point made wondering why the fuel storage was not targeted, the aviation fuel and also the fuel for the ships--why the storage tanks were not targeted. Could you speak to that, why those facilities weren't hit?

Abe: In my study after the war, I think that was an important point, but perhaps this is very difficult, beyond my ability of the English language. Most historians say that the main purpose of the Pearl Harbor attack was to save time--three or four months--for the Japanese Army to occupy Southeast Asia for the natural resources: French Indochina, Dutch East Indies. I suppose it was necessary to allow three or four months for the occupation. If the American Pacific Fleet was mobile, Japan could not do that operation in Southeast Asia, so we had to hit American Pacific Fleet before that in order to save time, three, four months, that most historians say was necessary.

But, I don't think so. If it's true, why not have Japanese task force hit the supporting bases, fuel tanks, ammunition storage, or the west side of Ford Island? Why not? Isoroku Yamamoto was thinking another way.

Daniels: They were thinking they needed about six months to

conquer the Southeast Pacific, and by knocking out our ships that would give them enough time.

Abe: If actually Isoroku Yamamoto had tried to attack the American Pacific Fleet to save time during the Southeast Asia operation, why didn't he order attacks on fuel tanks, submarine bases, dockyards, or ammunition storage? We should have attacked that. If we did so, Pearl Harbor would have lost the ability to support--maybe more than half a year--the Pacific Fleet. We had sunk the battleships in very shallow water, and the U.S. Navy was able to salvage them.

Byrd: They salvaged several of them, as a matter of fact.

Abe: So, Isoroku Yamamoto--he is sleeping in the cemetery very close to my town--was thinking another way from what most historians says. About one year prior to that, Prime Minister Konoye asked Yamamoto--already he was assigned commander-in-chief of the fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy--if Japan would fight with United States of America. The Imperial Japanese Navy would be the main force in the encounter, not the army. The navy would be the primary force in the encounter. "Do you have confidence to fight with United States of America?" Prime Minister Konoye asked Yamamoto. Yamamoto, when he was young, was stationed in Washington. He was one of the most knowledgeable persons about America and the American people. He

answered Konoye, "I don't fight with Americans because I know America. If you order me to fight against America, maybe for one year we will fight very well, but no longer." He had no confidence at all in a Japanese victory. Yamamoto knew how the United States was a big country, that the American military was strong.

From Japan to Hawaii is about 7,000 kilometers. In case of war, when America came over toward Japan in the western Pacific, the Japanese fleet would wait. Remember that the American Navy had ten ships, Japan had only six, and England had ten, according to the Washington Treaty. Japan could not have more than six ships in a naval force. In order to fight with six against American's ten, we had to reduce American power by 10 or 20 percent before the battleships met. Japan would thus use submarines and destroyer squadrons to reduce the U.S. fleet as it advanced across the Pacific. Then, as the American force got smaller than ten, maybe nine, or eight, or six, we would fight. That was the basic Japanese strategy since the Russo-Japanese War. That was the principal, basic strategy of the Imperial Japanese Navy toward the American Navy.

So, Japanese ships were built not to cruise such a long way. At Pearl Harbor in 1941, thirty ships participated. All of them couldn't get to Hawaii and

back to Japan without refueling. Coming all the way from Japan was very unusual. Franklin Roosevelt didn't think that way. Admiral Kimmel thought that maybe Japan would open battle somewhere, but he didn't think Japan would come from that far away to Hawaii.

The second point is that Isoroku Yamamoto used human submarines--midget submarines. The third point is that Isoroku Yamamoto still believed that the battleship was the main force of navies. Not only in the Japanese Navy, but also all modern, powerful navies had that same thinking, same principle, basic idea. The main force of the sea battle was the battleship, the big gun. That was the idea. So, if Japan attacked and sunk several warships of the Pacific Fleet of America, the American people would be so surprised: "Why? Japan is crazy! No war!" Isoroku Yamamoto expected it to be that way, I think. If Isoroku Yamamoto himself thought that the purpose of the Pearl Harbor attack was to save three or four months of time, we had to hit the fuel tanks, submarine bases, dry docks, ammunition storage. We should have attacked those things if that was his thinking. So, I wonder. Do you understand what I mean? The expression is beyond my ability of English.

Byrd: The question revolved around whether there was a planned third wave of planes or not.

Abe: The commander-in-chief of the task force, Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, was a very excellent admiral, but he didn't know about air power. He was an excellent admiral, but from the viewpoint of a submarine or torpedo specialist. His mission was to attack the main body of the American Pacific Fleet. He was responsible to save our very important aircraft carriers and bring them back to Japan. He estimated that the damage that the first wave and the second wave gave to the American fleet was enough. To bring the main portions of the Japanese naval force, the six aircraft carriers, back to Japan safely, he thought that was his very important responsibility, so he didn't order the third attack. We searched around the ocean near the Hawaiian Islands, and we couldn't find the American carriers--Enterprise, Yorktown--so, we didn't try the third attack.

Daniels: This is Admiral Nagumo you are talking about?

Abe: Admiral Chuichi Nagumo.

Byrd: Were you shocked at either how much resistance you got or did not get at Pearl Harbor? How much ground fire, if any? Was there much that you noticed, as you came in on the second wave?

Abe: What?

Byrd: Did you take any hostile fire when you came in on the second wave over Pearl Harbor?

Abe: Before we reached Oahu Island from the north side, I

saw numerous antiaircraft guns. Just 3,000 meters above the ground, I looked up, just as I caught "Tora! Tora! Tora!" from Fuchida. But just a few minutes before we reached Kaneohe, I looked far away and saw counterattacks hitting the level bombers of the first wave. The American counterattack was so prompt, accurate, that it surprised me.

After diving, I recognized that my second mate was shot down. I just flew to the rendezvous point, northwest from Kaena Point, twenty miles northwest from there, at altitude of 1,000 meters. I reached there and awaited my comrades assembling there, but my second in command couldn't come. After I returned to Akagi, I noticed that in the third platoon of the first squadron, three aircraft were shot down.

Byrd: So, as you folks came in, the fire increased, and the accuracy increased?

Abe: Yes. At that time, Lieutenant Taylor, Lieutenant Welch, and other P-40 pilots were brave enough to make counterattacks toward the second wave.

Byrd: Three planes?

Abe: Six. Taylor, Welch, and four others, totaling six P-40s. They took off from Wheeler against the second wave. I don't know if my second mate and the three Vals of the first squadron of the Akagi crashed because of the antiaircraft guns or were shot down. They were

so brave, and their counterattack was so prompt and so accurate.

Byrd: After the attack was over and you went back to your carriers...you say your carriers were all going back to Japan. Did you stay with that same carrier throughout the war.

Abe: On the Akagi, yes.

Byrd: What was your next duty assignment, next mission, after Pearl Harbor?

Abe: We returned on the 25th or 26th of December, 1941, to Japan from that Pearl Harbor operation. We spent New Year's at home, maybe a vacation of three or four days. I visited my father. My mother died when I was nine years old. My father was alive, and I met him.

Then on the 3rd or 4th of January, 1942, I got on board the Akagi, and the task force sailed south to the Celebes Islands, now Indonesia. During that time, the Japanese Navy was in the operation for the occupation of that area--Celebes Islands, Borneo. The Japanese Navy was fighting there, in the Philippines, and those areas. So, our task force was maneuvering over here [gesture on map], and on the 19th of February, 1942, we attacked Port Darwin, a very important, big port in the northwest of Australia.

[Tape 2, Side 1]

Then we moved to the Indian Ocean because the Japanese

Army was on an expedition in Burma.

Byrd: So, the Japanese Army was in Burma at that time, on the move in Burma?

Abe: Right. Our naval task force was maneuvering in the Indian Ocean. Then on the morning of the 5th of April, 1942, we saw seaplanes from two British heavy cruisers, Dorsetshire and Cornwall, that were cruising about 200 miles south of Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. We were flying Vals, 99-Type dive-bombers that the U. S. Military had nicknamed "Vals." On the Akagi, Soryu, and Hiryu, the pilots were well-trained, well-trained.

Byrd: The pilots were well-trained?

Abe: Yes, yes, well-trained. They had trained one year and a half. The same, the same...

Byrd: The same groups, the same ships, the same aircraft. So, they were really proficient by then?

Abe: Yes, yes. We always kept planes aboard in case an enemy aircraft carrier, battleship, or cruiser suddenly appeared. We used Kates, Vals, with Zero fighter escorts, in our attack. Then we always kept heading toward the enemy's ships. Then one of our seaplanes found the British ship and reported to the flagship Akagi: "Two heavy cruisers, British ships!"

Byrd: These were British cruisers?

Abe: Yes. At that time I was leader of the 2nd Squadron on the Akagi. There were two squadrons on the Akagi, and

the senior squadron leader was sick. So, I led two squadrons from the Akagi and all of the Vals from the Soryu and Hiryu toward the cruisers.

Byrd: So, you led all the Vals on the mission?

Abe: Yes. But, the first report from the seaplane was that they were destroyers. So, the Vals are good enough to hit destroyers. Headquarters thought that way at that time, because the Val only had one 250-kilogram bomb, about equal to a 550-pound bomb. The Kate had an 800-kilogram bomb. A torpedo weighed about equal--800 kilograms. That's about equal to 1,700 pounds.

Byrd: A 1,700-pound bomb?

Abe: Yes. The Kate carried that kind of bomb. That's enough for a cruiser, but a 250-kilogram bomb (chuckle) couldn't pierce the armor of the heavy cruiser. But headquarters thought that way.

Byrd: So, headquarters thought that you were going after a couple of destroyers, and they wound up to be a couple of heavy cruisers.

Abe: Yes. They said, "Vals, go ahead!" From all three aircraft carriers--Akagi, Soryu, Hiryu--a total of fifty-four Vals took off. While we were going down south toward the British heavy cruisers, maybe ten minutes later, fifteen minutes later, the seaplane reported that the British ships was not destroyers, but were heavy cruisers. Then headquarters surmised: "Vals

are not sufficient to attack heavy cruisers. Go ahead, load torpedos! Hurry! Hurry!"

Byrd: So, then you changed your armament?

Abe: No. They said, "Go ahead! Go ahead!" While they were preparing the Kates for the torpedo attack, we sank the cruisers, because our group, with fifty-four bombs, sunk the ships perfectly.

Byrd: Now which ship was sunk?

Abe: Dorsetshire and Cornwall. I think that they were sister ships.

Byrd: Two big cruisers. So, you got the right message and changed your weapons to torpedos and were able to sink those ships?

Abe: No! No!

Daniels: No, they had already gone out with the 250-killogram bombs and did the job before the other planes got there.

Byrd: Oh, I see.

Abe: Headquarters, the top brass, said, "Oh, the Val is not of sufficient strength to pierce the armor of a heavy cruiser! Go ahead! Go ahead! Prepare Kates!" While that was happening, we sank both ships.

Byrd: Both of them, huh? So, headquarters learned a lesson then?

Abe: Yes. We sunk them with the massed power of Vals. Each Val had one 250-kilogram bomb underneath the body. We

hit about forty-five bombs of fifty-four. They were escaping at full speed.

Byrd: So, they were zig-zagging?

Abe: Yes. We were down very close--400 meters high. After we released the bombs and pulled the stick, then the airplanes came down very close to the surface--maybe forty meters or fifty meters.

Byrd: You were really down "on the deck?" You were close to the water, then?

Abe: Yes. The percentage of the hits was more than 87 percent. So, from Akagi, Soryu, Hiryu, a total of six squadrons that took off--fifty Vals--(chuckle) Dorsetshire and the Cornwall had about an equal number of hits, about twenty, maybe more than that, each.

Byrd: That many hits?

Abe: Many, many hits. So, within maybe seventeen or eighteen minutes, they sank.

Byrd: So, they sank pretty quickly? In seventeen, eighteen minutes, they were down?

Abe: Then four days later, the 9th of April, in almost the same area, our seaplane found the British aircraft carrier Hermes. This ship, too, we sank.

Byrd: This was with Vals, too?

Abe: Yes.

Byrd: The same bomb load, the same kind of 250-kilogram bombs?

Abe: We were always prepared for enemy ships that appeared suddenly.

Byrd: Did they get any planes off to come and meet you? Did the British carrier get any aircraft off to meet you?

Abe: No. I wonder why they did not. I didn't study the history of that. Later on, I was at Guadalcanal, South Pacific, the Marianas area of the Pacific. Then, let's see, in 1944, I went through the "Turkey Shoot" in the Marianas.

Byrd: I've heard of this: "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot."

Abe: (Chuckle) I made a forced landing on that island. It was the 19th of June. Did I talk already about it?

Byrd: No, I thought we were going to talk a little bit about operations in the Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians and then go to the Marianas.

Daniels: What happened after April, 1942? Where'd you go next?

Abe: We came back to Japan. While we were passing through the Straits of Formosa, north of Formosa, toward Japan, Doolittle attacked the Japanese mainland. That was on the 18th of April, 1942.

Byrd: So, was your unit called back then?

Abe: Oh, yes. Headquarters ordered the task force back to Japan. We didn't know how the Americans could come to Japan that soon.

Byrd: So, that was a surprise when those bombers came up?

Abe: Oh, yes. After they bombed Japan, they headed toward

China. Surprise attack.

Byrd: So, I guess, then, your unit was called back closer for guard duty?

Abe: Yes. Yamamoto was shocked because the Imperial Palace is in Tokyo (chuckle), so Yamamoto ordered, "Hurry! Hurry! Stop the American naval air force from coming through the middle of the Pacific, through the Aleutians, and Kuril Islands!" So, Isoroku Yamamoto ordered, "Hurry! Hurry! Go occupy Midway and Attu and Kiska, in the Aleutians." (Chuckle) During the past operations many pilots died. Many aircraft crashed. We had to have rest and had to train. Administration is very important, but everything was "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!" I transferred from Akagi to a new aircraft carrier, Junyo.

Byrd: So, this is a brand-new carrier then?

Abe: Yes. It probably was designed as a commercial lines ship, but when the keel of that ship was set, it was changed to make it into an aircraft carrier. So, she couldn't make much speed. An aircraft carrier must be a speedy runner.

Byrd: An aircraft carrier must be fast.

Abe: Yes, for running aircraft off the deck--more than thirty knots, if possible.

Byrd: So, this carrier could make thirty knots?

Abe: No, no! Usually, it is necessary, but Junyo's top

speed was only twenty-six knots.

Daniels: So, your carrier was in the task force that moved against the Aleutians?

Abe: Yes. Akagi, Kaga, Soryu, Hiryu--the main body--went to Midway. My aircraft carrier, Junyo, went to the Aleutians. The purpose of the Aleutians operation had two objects. One is...I don't remember the word.

Daniels: Diversion?

Abe: Oh, yes! Diversion! Diversion for Midway. And one purpose was to directly support the landing on Kiska of Japanese troops. I thought "Never happen!"

Daniels: So, how did your part of the operation go? What did you do?

Abe: [He quotes at length from the paper he will read at the 1993 Nimitz Symposium.]: "Aleutian Campaign." "Finishing the Indian Ocean operation in April, 1942, I returned to the mainland at Yokosuka. I was transferred from Akagi to Junyo. Starting in mid-April, 1942, I flung myself into the work of the Vals' organization and training. I had two squadrons of Vals. Later, the carrier Junyo was admitted as the second ship in the 4th Air Tactical Group and participated in the second step of the operation." [Side comment] The first step began with the Pearl Harbor attack and the occupation of the Southeast Asia area. It took maybe three months, four months. That

was the first step of the operation. In the second part of the operation, highest headquarters didn't have an exact idea, because the first step of the operation had done more than highest headquarters expected.

"The second ship of the 4th Air Tactical Group participated in the second step of the operation on May 20, 1942. The air company group was accommodated on the carrier. However, half of the crews of this group were trainee pilots, and their training period was too short to join the actual operation. They were deficient in maneuvering tactics." The first point is that we didn't have sufficient time to train for war.

Daniels: Because Yamamoto wanted speed?

Abe: Yes. "Hurry up! Hurry up!" [Continues reading from paper.] "During this time, the only information we had on Dutch Harbor was an old map that had been published thirty years prior, plus a photograph taken by a Japanese fishing boat in the Bering Sea. We did not have any fresh information or intelligence data at all. No one knew if there was an airfield or not. There was nothing we could study. We didn't have any information about the Aleutians." I didn't know where Dutch Harbor was located exactly.

"The third point is the weather conditions. It is not the place to use dive-bombers. Anyhow, on May 27, 1942, we left Ominato for the Aleutians. Several hours

later, our troops were in the fog. After that, and until we returned to Ominato in the middle of June at the finish of the Aleutians campaign, our sight [visibility] was quite limited by low, heavy clouds and thick fog outside. I can recall that I saw the blue sky only once during this time."

Byrd: So, you were really "socked-in" there with clouds and fog then?

Abe: Yes. "Of course, the air tactical group reached the vicinity of Dutch Harbor, located some 200 miles south of Unalaska Island on June 3, 1942. We received our orders to commence air attacks. I rushed out, early in the morning, leading two squadrons of Vals. We reached the target area, but these heavy clouds prevented us from accomplishing our objectives. We tried to approach the target again in the afternoon of that day, but due to terrible weather conditions, we were forced to return to the carrier. On our way back, we encountered an American PBY Catalina at a low attitude and in the clouds. I tried twice, but it never happened. But the commander ordered us to attack anyhow. He was originally a gunnery officer. He knew that a month ago we had hit the British cruisers and the Hermes. 'Superpower! Eighty-seven percent hits in Indian Ocean!' So, the commander wanted to use dive-bombers, anyhow. I came back and thought, 'No, never

happen!' But I was a lieutenant senior grade, and he was an admiral."

Daniels: I think the admiral won.

Abe: He was on board the flagship. I was aboard the second ship. The first ship was smaller than the second one, so the first one didn't have Vals, only Zero fighters and the Kates.

Byrd: Who was that admiral? Who was your commander?

Abe: Kakuta! Kakuta! [RADM Kakuji Kakuta]

Byrd: He was a big gun man, a big battleship man.

Abe: Yes, yes, yes. He died in the Marianas in 1944, when I went to the "Marianas Turkey Shooting." He was the commander over all the air forces in the Marianas area. [Returning to the paper.] "In the afternoon of the following day, June 4, 1942, the commanding admiral ordered me to bomb Dutch Harbor. That was a difficult bombing mission. I thought that, under the same weather conditions, with thick clouds covering Unalaska Island during the attack, we would be thwarted. It might not be possible for us to make our accurate bombing activity, and also unable to assemble in the air without difficulty. In view of the above situation, I intentionally decreased the number of attack aircraft for this operation. The first squadron had six out of nine, and the second element had five planes, excluding the young, unskilled pilots, for a

total of eleven out of eighteen planes."

Byrd: So, you're leaving the young guys back? The untrained ones?

Abe: Yes. "We used eleven planes. We found our targets through a small hole in the clouds. Flak from antiaircraft guns covered the sky around us. We felt very irritated until we left this area. After our bombing attack, we crept around until we came into the Bering Sea. The squadron leader, Harano, and Numata were very close to me, but the other aircraft were out of sight. Our three planes flew around the northern part of Unalaska Island. According to our operation plans in advance, originally we were supposed to be at the rendezvous point, which we called 'Maru Nishi' as nickname [code name]. We called 'Maru Nishi' by transmitter as our signaling code, over the western cape of Unalaska Island. I simply judged that our main supporting aircraft of Zero fighters must wait for us, and it forestalled the Vals at 'Maru Nishi.' I was getting impatient. I wanted to go forward with the rest of my subordinates.

"After a while, I noticed something bright on my left side and believed that it must be the Umnak Channel. Then we went through the south of the channel. We should have reached 'Maru Nishi,' and I could see several small-type aircraft under the clouds

around the channel area. It was cloudy, and we flew at 300-meter altitude. I thought that these must be Zero fighters, and I felt relief. I became very optimistic at that moment and hoped to be able to return to the Junyo and get together with my comrades at 'Maru Nishi.'

"Very unfortunately, however, I was quite shocked to find that the Zeros I had spotted were actually nine enemy P-40s. As I was flying toward the direction of Umnak Channel over the Bering Strait, with clouds down to a hundred meters above the sea, on the western side was Unalaska Island, and on the eastern side was Umnak Island, I figured that there was no other way of returning to my carrier without going through the channel.

"All of a sudden, I was attacked by P-40s from both sides. I fought back against one of them, but another one shot at me. Fortunately, my comrade, Harano, chased after it. It became a confused melee. I saw another comrade, Numata, engaged in the dogfight with a P-40 about 300 meters above the sea, in some dark clouds. They were circling vertically. From the Bering Sea toward the south, I had to cross Umnak Channel, west of Unalaska Island, covered by clouds. East of Umnak Island was covered by clouds, too, very narrow, and the clouds were at 300 meters altitude."

Byrd: So, these guys are flying around in the cloud bank shooting at you?

Abe: Yes. Me, P-40; me, P-40; Harano, P-40; Numata, P-40. Like that. The other P-40s were all around.

Byrd: You're swirling around in this cloud bank then?

Abe: Yes. Despite all of that I found an airfield at the east end of Umnak Island. Headquarters didn't know where the American airfield was located or (chuckle) where the rendezvous point was located. I found it was located very close to the airfield, there were P-40s. [Returning to paper.] "I saw another comrade, Numata, engaged in the dogfight with a P-40 about 300 meters above the sea in some dark, low clouds. They were circling vertically, each trying to get on the other's tail. I was sweating profusely, and time seemed to stand still. Actually, it was only several seconds at the most. A little later, I found out that both Harano and Numata dove into the sea in flames. Several P-40s were still flying around. I figured that the P-40s were based on the east side of Umnak Island. I was now all alone and sought protection in the clouds. The second element leader, Yamamoto, transmitted a message saying that he had just run out of fuel and was going to ditch on the water." Maybe he was shot in his fuel tank.

Byrd: His fuel tank was shot up?

Abe: Yes. "A little later Sugie transmitted the following: 'I shot down an enemy plane and am returning to ship.' Sugie and Okada were with us on our first campaign and were the youngest pair among us. They were in Yamamoto's platoon. About thirty minutes later, I received his message as follows: 'I am flying over 200 degrees, but cannot see the aircraft carrier, so please generate smoke for confirmation use.' My understanding was that he was alone and lost himself, and the carrier continuously transmitted a message to Sugie to dispatch a long wave, but he couldn't respond to Junyo. Perhaps his wave receiving equipment was inoperative."

Byrd: Maybe his radio was shot up?

Abe: Yes. Maybe the P-40s shot him up. [Returning to paper.] "He was reporting to the aircraft carrier: 'I turned my plane over to 20 degrees north.' Because our task force was maneuvering about 200 miles down south from Unalaska Island, he was reporting to the aircraft carrier, 'I turned my plane over to 20 degrees,' because he was navigating toward the location of the aircraft carrier down south, 200 degrees, but he couldn't find the Junyo. Then he thought he had passed by the carrier because of the clouds and fog. Then he turned up north. Then he said, 'Turn on your seachlight! I cannot find aircraft carrier. Please exhale smoke. Please turn on your searchlight!' He's

asking, and I had my radio on. Thus, he was anxiously looking for the aircraft carrier. I myself, immediately upon landing on Junyo, burst into the radio room and ordered the operator: 'Send message to dispatch a long wave to Sugie right now!' The radioman transmitted: 'Do your best until you run out of the last drop of fuel.' This order was the only thing that I could do for him at that time. In spite of this, I knew that Sugie could never hear me." That is all of the story about the air actions to this end.

[Refers to paper.] "Looking back to the various events of World War II, I am absolutely convinced that the Aleutians Campaign in the year of 1942 was not necessary. It did not make any sense to occupy Attu and Kiska Island. If Midway was our primary objective, I really wonder why our headquarters did not concentrate the majority of their forces there instead of scattering our strength up to Dutch Harbor. All of the Aleutians Campaign, in my opinion, should not have been carried out. On June 5, 1982, we had our ribbon cutting ceremony for the war memorial at the Dutch Harbor Air Base. I was particularly impressed with the generosity of American friends. We, the Japanese veterans of this conflict, were touched to have shared the honor with the natives of the Aleutians, the U.S. troops, and the Canadian soldiers." That's all.

Daniels: You got back to your ship. What other part did your ship play in the Aleutians Campaign? Anything more?

Abe: I went back to Japan after that.

Daniels: Is that what you did? You just turned around and went back to Japan?

Abe: Yes. Sugie died, Yamamoto died, Harano died. I had lost four planes and eight air crews on that operation. I heard that at the main operation at Midway, we had lost four aircraft carriers. I thought at that time that the war would end very soon.

Then from the aircraft carrier Junyo, coming toward Ominato, I transferred to another new aircraft carrier, Hiyo. I didn't have time to grieve over lost comrades. I had to transfer. I had to go to the next new aircraft carrier.

Daniels: Which was?

Abe: Hiyo.

Daniels: That was your new posting?

Abe: New post. Sister ship of Junyo.

Byrd: Sister ship of Junyo.

[Tape 2, Side 2]

Byrd: We were talking about your transfer to the new carrier. After the Dutch Harbor and the Aleutians Campaign, you transferred to a new ship.

Abe: Hiyo. A new ship and a new Val squadron. We had to train for the coming operations.

Daniels: When did you transfer?

Abe: Right after we came back from the Aleutians.

Daniels: What date?

Abe: Oh, maybe the middle of June, 1942.

Daniels: Okay.

Abe: After we got back from the Aleutians, I transferred to the Hiyo, a brand-new one, a sister ship of Junyo.

Daniels: So, it's a light carrier?

Abe: No. The tonnage was maybe 20,000 tons--not so small, not so big, just medium.

Byrd: Medium, then?

Abe: The size was medium, but the speed was not so fast.

Daniels: The Akagi, how big was it?

Abe: Akagi? Akagi was built bigger than that. In tonnage, the Akagi was 34,000 or 35,000 tons.

Byrd: You said that you had lost a lot of comrades at Dutch Harbor, friends and well-trained pilots, during that whole Midway business and the diversion up to the Aleutians?

Abe: Yes. It eliminated many air crews--the attack on Dutch Harbor.

Byrd: So, you are down, you said, to a lot of the inexperienced pilots?

Abe: After we came back from the Indian Ocean, we organized new Val squadrons picking up crews from every place. We got those who had experience in China (chuckle) or

experience a long time as instructors and like that. This paper on the Aleutians thing was in a special issue back in 1983, the fortieth anniversary of the Aleutians Campaign. [Reading from paper.] "The Battle of Dutch Harbor contributed to the ultimate American victory over Japan in World War II in two ways. One, by diverting their forces between the Aleutians and the South Pacific, the Japanese considerably weakened their offensive position. As a consequence of their devastating defeat at Midway, morale was lowered, and the tide of naval superiority went to the American side. Secondly, after the battle settled down [ended], a Japanese Zero was discovered on Akutan Island. The knowledge gained by the examination of this aircraft enabled the U.S. forces to effectively combat the Japanese in the air."

Byrd: You said a minute ago that by the time of the Battle of Midway, you were beginning to think that the war was lost. Were any of your counterparts, any of your other squadron leaders, demoralized as well during that time?

Abe: I couldn't catch the point of your question.

Byrd: You said that you, yourself, personally, were beginning to think that the war might be lost by the time the Battle of Midway was fought. Were any of the other squadron leaders, any other of your counterparts at the command level, also demoralized after Midway?

Daniels: Did any of your fellows share your view?

Abe: You mean thought the same way as me?

Byrd: Yes, sir.

Abe: Well, I don't know, because under that situation we could not speak.

Daniels: It wasn't safe to talk about it?

Abe: No.

Daniels: So, you are now on the Hiyo. Did they go through a period of training, or did they send you out on action right away?

Abe: In September and October, we maneuvered in Southeast Asia, and Hiyo was one of the task force after we had lost four main aircraft carriers at Midway. We were the number two task force and were maneuvering about the Solomons. For Hiyo, that was its first cruising, first maneuvering, after she was born, and she had engine trouble. They couldn't run, so I left Hiyo for the Buin end of Bougainville Island. Bougainville is the big island of the Solomon Islands--the most western.

Byrd: So, you went to Bougainville.

Abe: And Buin is located on the south end of Bougainville Island. The squadron landed there.

Daniels: What part did your squadron play in the Bougainville Campaign?

Abe: We landed on Bougainville Island.

Daniels: So, you landed.

Abe: The Hiyo had headed for Truk Island for repairs.

Byrd: The Hiyo went to Truk. To get repaired?

Abe: Yes, Truk Island. Truk Island at that time was a big naval base, a supporting base.

Byrd: So, it went there to get its engines worked on? You said its engines were acting up?

Abe: Yes.

Byrd: So, it went to get repaired?

Abe: Yes.

Daniels: So, you didn't go with them. You stayed on Bougainville.

Byrd: So, the planes got off the carrier and went to Bougainville, and the carrier went to Truk for repairs.

Abe: Yes. I don't know what the Americans called that battle. We called it the South Pacific Battle. In late October--I don't remember exactly what date--maybe 24th or 25th of October, 1942, the South Pacific Sea Battle occurred. I couldn't join that South Pacific Battle. In the fighting between the United States and Japanese troops at Guadalcanal to take the airfields, we lost many, many experienced pilots in maybe four months, five months. I attacked Guadalcanal from Bougainville Island.

Daniels: You did?

Abe: Yes. I took one squadron, nine Vals usually. I lost

four or five of the nine. America became bigger, stronger than Japan (chuckle).

Daniels: Did your squadron lose many planes?

Byrd: He said he lost five out of nine there.

Daniels: Your squadron lost five out of nine?

Abe: Yes.

Daniels: And the five were experienced pilots?

Abe: Not so many experienced pilots there. At that time we had lost many, many experienced pilots.

Daniels: So, you were already starting to be hurt?

Byrd: This is at Guadalcanal?

Daniels: So, then where did they send you?

Abe: Usually, in the Japanese Navy, the pilot rotation was for one year on an aircraft carrier, then the next year or two years were at a ground school or base. That was the normal rotation. But I was assigned to the aircraft carrier Soryu in October, 1940. In April, 1941, I was transferred from Soryu to Akagi. Then the war happened, and I was at sea one full year on the Akagi. Then I transferred to Junyo in April of 1942. I went with Junyo up to the Aleutians, and then I transferred to Hiyo and went to the south.

Daniels: Bougainville?

Abe: Bougainville. Two years. Already by that time the rotation was one year, so it was very natural to transfer to some easy position on the mainland.

Daniels: So, did they?

Abe: Yes, but I got malaria.

Daniels: On Bougainville?

Abe: I couldn't come back by air.

Byrd: So, you had to come back by ship then?

Abe: Yes. It took maybe a week by destroyer.

Byrd: Okay.

Daniels: So, where did they send you?

Abe: I spent one year ashore, and then I was assigned in early March of 1944...

Daniels: You spent a year in Japan?

Abe: Yes, one year.

Daniels: Doing what? Training people?

Abe: That was another item. The Admiral Nimitz Foundation curator has estimated that Imperial Japan at that time was stronger than it was. Nothing!

Daniels: What did you do for a year?

Abe: [Reading from paper.] "I was on duty in 1943 at the naval air base on the Japanese mainland. Now I want to describe how I carried out my missions, and the training activity of an aircraft carrier pilot. The reason, I guess, why I was transferred to inland shore duty from the aircraft carrier in November, 1942, was due to rather simple rotation purposes, being managed by the Administrative Division of the Naval Ministry. Because of this reason, I did not receive any special

training or mission at that time. Generally, in the Imperial Navy in peacetime, our carrier pilots were rotated under the following working formula: one year duty on a aircraft carrier, and then one or two years of shore duty. In my case, I was assigned to the aircraft carrier Soryu in October, 1940, and then in April, 1941, I went to the carrier Akagi. Tension between Japan and the United States prevented us from keeping our normal routines. Thus, from April, 1941, I served aboard the carrier Akagi: Pearl Harbor, Southeast Asia, Port Darwin, Indian Ocean. Then I was on the Junyo and Hiyo: South Pacific and Guadalcanal. I served continuously for two years on aircraft carriers. Therefore, it was quite natural that I was assigned to shore duty in November, 1942."

Daniels: Okay.

Abe: The curator estimates the power of Japan too highly. Almost down! Japan was ready to go under.

Byrd: Okay.

Abe: [Reading from paper.] "I then served fifteen months on the northern tip of the Kanto Plain before I was appointed as the group leader of the 652nd Kokutai Air Group. During this time, I was then recovering from a sickness, malaria. After continuous defeats at the hands of the Americans, especially after the disaster at Midway, Japan's navy and military power, as well as

her national economic capability, was declining day by day. Since the Manchurian incident, Japan was fighting. Ten years!"

Daniels: It was fighting all the time?

Abe: Yes. Then it happened--Pearl Harbor! Before that, eight years, nine years, we sent millions of troops over to China. We didn't have any resources--no fuel, no iron, no tin, no natural rubber, nothing. Japan was buying more than 50 percent of its fuel from America, and we were buying iron from America. So, since the Manchurian Incident, Japan was quite exhausted by the never-ending battles, one after another, with no sign of improvement. In fact, there was a shortage of goods and materials, and even our meals were controlled under special distribution procedures. At other times, as you know, we in Japan felt very gloomy inside. We saw our great losses, such as the death of our commander-in-chief, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. The suicidal attack on Attu Island by our troops--3,000, 4,000--of the army. So, we were so worn down, and we could not initiate an effective battle strategy against the Allied forces at all. Japan was already down at that time. So, I did not take any special training.

Daniels: So, in 1944, where'd they send you? To another carrier?

Abe: No. Again to the Junyo.

Byrd: Back to the Junyo. This is then going to the Marianas?

Abe: We didn't have enough fuel. At that time my squadron had the new dive-bomber, Suisei, with a Daimler-Benz engine, from Germany. Very, very fast! Faster than the Grummans [Hellcat, a U.S. Navy fighter plane]. We went to Tawitawi; it's very close to Borneo. The southwestern end of Philippines is where it is located. Because Borneo was full of oil and Japan did not have sufficient supplies, we went there. But this time we could not have sufficient training. We had left about the 10th of May, 1944, and sailed out of Japan toward Borneo, Tawitawi, and were training.

But Junyo was, as I said, converted to an aircraft carrier, and its speed was slow. In that season, the Pacific Ocean didn't have enough natural wind. In order to take off or land on the aircraft carrier, for the Suisei, my dive-bombers, at least eighteen meters per second speed was necessary, but the natural winds in that season were less than five meters per second.

Byrd: So, it makes it tough to take off?

Abe: So, we couldn't take off, so we had no training at all after we left Japan, from early May until the 19th of June, when the big American task force came over to the Marianas to occupy Saipan and Guam. I attacked on the 19th of June, but we came over there in the middle of May, 1944. So, for forty days or fifty days, we had no

flights at all.

Byrd: Because there was not enough wind?

Abe: None. The Americans were very excellent later, very excellent, later. They caught us before we were ready. Grummans! Many! Lots of Grummans! Grummans! Grummans! We lost about 300 aircraft with nothing done to the American task force. Our planes were shot down by Grummans, because our headquarters tried the one-way attack.

Byrd: Now, you're still flying these Vals then?

Abe: No, I was not flying Vals. We had a new, modern aircraft carrier dive-bomber, called the "Suisei."

Byrd: That's a new ship.

Abe: The name comes from a star. It's the name of a star.

Daniels: What did it do? How was it different?

Abe: The engine was a Daimler-Benz from German patents.

Daniels: Was it better than your Val?

Abe: Oh, yes! But we were not trained. It was very difficult.

Daniels: You weren't used to it? You hadn't learned how to fly it properly?

Abe: Yes. Our training was very short.

Daniels: Not enough training?

Abe: Not enough training, particularly before we attacked the American task force. For forty days, fifty days, we did no flying at all!

Byrd: So, you couldn't practice with it then because of the weather?

Abe: Yes. Then, in addition to that, the commander-in-chief of the Japanese task force tried a one-way attack.

Daniels: What do you mean by one-way attack?

Abe: No fuel to return. Take off and go one way and come down on land.

Daniels: Suicide?

Abe: No, not suicide. It was a so-called out of range operation. At that time the carriers, both American and Japanese, usually were 250 miles apart. If we closed to 250 miles, we could attack the American task force, but the American aircraft carriers could counter us instead. Japan had lost a big number at Midway.

Byrd: At Midway, yes.

Abe: They couldn't lose an aircraft carrier, so at this time we were far away, 400 miles away. Then, American aircraft from carriers couldn't come to attack us. But, "You go! You go! You go!" That's what the one-way attack means. The American task force entered from the west side of Mariana Islands, far from the East Pacific, 4,000 miles, 5,000 miles away, and came over to occupy Saipan and Guam. Four task force groups were maneuvering on the west side of the Mariana Islands.

We commenced our attack from 400 miles away, and after the attack the American task force landed on

Guam. We were supposed to refuel there, and the following day we were to come back to the carrier. That was the order. That was on the 15th of June, 1944. Four days prior, American Marines commenced landing on Saipan. That was on the 19th. Four days after their landing, it was, "Go ahead! Attack! After the attack, land on Guam, refuel there, and come back the following day." That was our orders.

Daniels: So, they ordered you to land on Saipan?

Abe: That was the "Turkey Shooting." Many, many Grummans.

Daniels: You didn't think to land on Saipan.

Abe: I couldn't land on Saipan, because Saipan was already occupied by the Marines. I tried to land on Guam Island. Whoa! (Chuckle) Never happened! Grummans!

Byrd: You were in the middle of a fight there?

Abe: After the attack, I looked around and set my plane down on the water.

Byrd: You were shot down?

Abe: Yes. I tried to land on Guam, but it never happened. The whole sky was full of Grummans. One group passed me.

Daniels: They shot you down. Is that what you are saying?

Abe: No, I escaped in the clouds. We had scattered clouds at about 800 meters or 1,000 meters over the Marianas. The Suisei was faster than Grummans, so we could escape in the clouds! Oh, all kinds of aircraft were coming,

coming. Then, fear maybe overcame me for one minute or two minutes. If I could find the ground on Rota Island...

Daniels: Which island?

Abe: Rota, a very small island located between Saipan and Guam. It's southwest from Saipan, maybe forty, fifty miles northeast from Guam Island. Just between Saipan and Guam, I found Rota Island.

Byrd: So you landed there.

Abe: Yes. I thought that I had escaped because no Grummans were behind me. So, I decided land. Then I was shot suddenly by four Grummans, so my airplane crashed. I escaped into the jungle just beside the runway.

Daniels: You crashed on Rota?

Abe: Rota. Headquarters tried to rescue me three times by submarine or seaplane, but apparently all the air lanes and sea lanes were occupied by the Americans. They couldn't come to pick me up.

In the meanwhile, then on Saipan the Japanese troops initiated a suicide attack, and then one month later, in September of 1944, Guam's Japanese garrison started suicide attacks. Banzai! It's all over. Then, the highest headquarters in Japan abandoned the Mariana Islands. "Oh, Abe, you're not necessary to come back. Stay on Rota Island and command all the naval garrison on Rota Island." So, I stayed until the

war was over.

Daniels: Rota didn't surrender until the war was over?

Abe: After that, on the 2nd of September, 1945, in Tokyo on American battleship Missouri, Japan signed the surrender. I surrendered at 1100 hours, on the 2nd of September, 1945, one mile offshore of Rota Island. Colonel Stint, U. S. Marine Corps, represented the commanding admiral of the Pacific Fleet of America, and he came over by destroyer. He called me (chuckle). I remember his name and signing the surrender conditions on board the American destroyer.

Daniels: All right, sir, your plane landed on Rota, and you became the commanding officer. How many men were there?

Abe: The navy garrison was in total about 1,600. The army had about 700, with an army major as the commanding officer.

Daniels: So, how many men total?

Abe: We had 2,300.

Daniels: And they were all under your command?

Abe: No. The army was under a major.

Daniels: You just commanded the navy people?

Abe: Yes.

Daniels: You were there how long?

Abe: Let's see. I got there June, 1944, and the war ended in August, 1945, so I spent fourteen months on Rota.

Daniels: And after the surrender, where did they take you?

Abe: We didn't know where we would go, but we are disarmed by the commander of the American authorities. LSTs came ashore, maybe three or four, on the morning of the 4th of September, 1945. The next day we landed on Guam. Then we went to the camp stockade.

Daniels: How long were you in the stockade?

Abe: Fifteen months, from September, 1945, until we got back home in late November of 1946.

Daniels: Why were you there so long? Do you know?

Abe: The Americans thought it would be maybe a couple of months, so they built very temporary housing for the Japanese POWs. We had tents in areas where the coconut trees had been cut.

Daniels: So, they had you working?

Abe: No. I wondered why we had to stay so long. After we came back to Japan, I knew why we stayed so long. The Japanese government asked MacArthur's headquarters that if he had the transportation to bring Japanese prisoners of war overseas back home, please send food instead of prisoners.

Daniels: So, the government asked for food instead of prisoners?

Abe: Yes. I heard that later on.

Daniels: So, it was your own government that kept you there?

Abe: Yes.

Daniels: What happened when you got home?

Abe: Since I left in May of 1944, almost two-and-a-half years had passed. When I flew out from my aircraft carrier, the order was: "After the attack on the American task force, land on Guam, refuel there, and come back to aircraft carrier the following day." That was the order. But in July of 1944, Saipan had a suicide attack, and in September, on Guam, the Japanese garrison--both army and navy--made a final suicide attack. So, people thought that maybe Abe, too, had died. My wife didn't have any official notification. She wondered if I was alive or I was dead.

Daniels: She didn't know?

Abe: She didn't know. Another reason for the uncertainty is that before I left Japan, I asked the paymaster to send my monthly pay to my wife instead of me. Money was not necessary on board an aircraft carrier. That was the kind of system we had. Several years later, we were talking about that, and we found that my wife never received any salary.

Daniels: Your wife never got any money?

Abe: Never. Two-and-a-half years. That is one reason my wife thought maybe I was dead, without any official information from headquarters.

Daniels: So, your arrival was a surprise?

Abe: Yes. And I found my father dead. My mother died when I was nine years old.

Daniels: How long had you been married by then?

Abe: I married in 1940, and my head son was born in May of 1941. That was the same day I was promoted to lieutenant senior grade.

Daniels: Good day!

Abe: I remember.

Daniels: What did you do after the war?

Abe: I couldn't have an official job by MacArthur's order. So, I worked at salvage in the Inland Sea. Very shortly, I worked for the Toyota Motor Company. Two kinds of jobs I had. Then in 1950 the Korean War started, and MacArthur ordered Japan to make the National Police Reserve. At that time, the headquarters of National Police Reserve invited me to join as an officer, a major.

Daniels: What did you do?

Abe: I entered the new army.

Daniels: Doing what? Flying?

Abe: No, no, no. National Police Reserve. We learned from the U. S. Army. At Yokosuka, under American instructors, we studied a couple of months to be an officer of the new Japanese Army. Very shortly, I was assigned to Regiment S-1, which was headquartered in Yamaguchi Prefecture. Then the headquarters of the National Police Reserve planned to send forty-five students to train to be young officers of the infantry.

So, we came over near Tokyo and entered into language school to learn English, to prepare to study in the United States.

Daniels: When you were finished with the military, what sort of civilian job did you do?

Abe: After retiring in 1967, I worked with a plastics company, Ube Plastics, as senior managing director, for seventeen years.

Daniels: When did you retire from that?

Abe: When I was sixty-nine years old, I think, eight or nine years ago.

Daniels: In 1983 or 1984?

Abe: Yes.

Daniels: Well, I thank you very much, sir. I appreciate it.