

Abner Aust Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler and today is the 19th of March 2013. I am in Fredericksburg, Texas, and I am conducting a telephone interview with Mr. Abner Aust. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information Related to This Site. So, let me start, Abner, by thanking you for spending the time this morning to share your experiences with us, and let's get it started by having you give us your full name, and date and place of birth and we'll take it from there.

ABNER AUST: Okay. My name is Abner, A-B-N-E-R, Maurice, M-A-U-R-I-C-E, Aust, A-U-S-T, Jr. I was born on 7 October 1921, in Scoova, S-C-O-O-V-A, Mississippi. We lived there for a short period of time, and moved over to Geiger, Alabama, where a lot of the Aust family lived. They came from Germany in 1772 -- my great grandfather -- into South Carolina, and had one son -- three years old -- and (inaudible) between Charleston, South Carolina, and Stokes, North Carolina. They had another son born, and that was my great grandfather.

EM: Now, did you have brothers and sisters?

AA: Yes. I have three sisters. I'm the oldest. The next sister to me is 15 months younger. Then there's two more after that. The last one was born in 1932. They're all living, and I correspond with my oldest sister, and my youngest sister. The other one lives not too far by, but I haven't seen her in a long time.

EM: Oh, okay. And what did your father and mother do for a living when you were growing up?

AA: Well, in the beginning my father was an orphan. His father died when he was either one day old, or the day before he was born. His older brother and sister were twins. Then there was another sister. He was the youngest, and he was born in Garden City, Texas, and the mother brought him back to the uncles there in Mississippi and Alabama, and my father married my mother. I'm not sure of the date, or anything else, but he worked with his uncles in that way. Later we moved out to Lawton, Oklahoma, when I was about four years old, and my father worked for his brother. His brother had a big cotton seed oil mill there Lawton, and he worked there for two or three years. Then we moved to a little town by the name of (inaudible), a little town not far from there, and he ran a grist mill there. When the

Depression came along, he was working in the oil field. Then he'd go out to work one morning, and everything had been moved during the night. So, we moved back to Mississippi, near his sister, and we raised cotton the first year there. In that part of the country, cotton didn't grow very well. We made one bale on 15 acres. After that we moved to the Mississippi Delta. We lived as sharecroppers for a couple of years, and we bought our own mules and things like that, but my father was a farmer most of his life.

EM: Boy, you moved around a lot as a kid. Didn't you?

AA: Yes. We did. I started school -- they wouldn't let me start in Lawton until I was seven years old. Well, we moved up to Sterling, Oklahoma, and I started when I was seven years old, but in those days, there, you started the first of August. You went to school a month, and they let out. Everybody went out and helped the farmers pick their cotton. Well, come February, when my sister was five, they let her start school there at Sterling, and she and I went through school all the way. We graduated at the same time.

EM: I'll be darned, even though you were a year plus older than she was.

AA: Yeah. I was 15 months older than she was.

EM: Yeah. So, where did you go then to high school?

AA: We moved from the east part of Mississippi over to Louis, Mississippi, in the Mississippi Delta. We worked on a farm there. We lived there until 1946. I went through grammar school there in Louis, Mississippi. I went five years without missing a day. I was on the honor roll all during that period of my life. In 1936, we moved to Belzoni, Mississippi. That was the county seat, and it had a sign coming in: "Heart of the Delta". I graduated. I was in the ninth grade then. I went on through high school there. I graduated in May of 1940 at Belzoni High School.

EM: So, when you got out of high school, what did you do? Did you go to work? Did you go to college, or what?

AA: Well, my last year in high school, I took Diversified Occupation, and I'd go to school in the morning, and I worked for Ford Motor Company there in Belzoni in the afternoons and on Saturdays. That paid me two dollars and a half a week for my work, and after I'd been there for about six weeks, they laid off one of the mechanics, because I've always been a good worker, and did more than my share of whatever had to be done, but when I graduated from high school, that summer I worked for the county Road Department, and I ran road grader. We had two road graders

being pulled by one tractor, and since they had a lot of dust on the cycle one night, I ended up having to run a second road grader. Every time a car would by, I had crank the steering wheel over, and move over, so they could go by. After I finished up that -- we didn't have bulldozers in those days. So, we were clearing the right-of-way, and I went out to clearing this right away, and I used dynamite to blow the stumps off, and had one big old stump there.

At my age, I was playing around. I put 40 sticks of dynamite in there, and I blew it about 200 feet in the air.

EM: (laughs) That was quite an event for the county, I guess.

AA: Yeah. Well, I was the only one out there. So, nobody else knew that, but see I drilled holes under all these stumps and put the stick of dynamite in there, and put an electric cap in it, and I'd get about 15 of them dug, and I'd go back and push that lever down, and they'd go off, but after about a week, about three o'clock in the afternoon, breathing that... Nobody thought anything about that nitroglycerine, but that stuff would give you such a bad headache, you just had to quit. Then, when I finished that up, I got a job with state Agricultural Department, measuring cotton -- measuring land -- because in those days they had a certain amount of cotton they could plant, but

since I grew up on a farm, it was really easy for me, because I could look at the land and tell where the cotton stopped, and where the corn was, and everything else. So, I could get a lot done in a short period of time, but when that summer was over, my county, Humphreys County, Leflore, and one other county had their own junior college. So, I entered junior college in September of 1940. The first semester I picked cotton. I picked cotton at home, but only one day in my life did I pick more than 200 pounds. I got up really early, and got all that dew that made the cotton weigh more, and I got 216 pounds at once in one day.

EM: You got paid for the moisture, then, if you picked early, huh?

AA: That's right. It made the cotton weigh more. We had a big, tall, slender black fellow working for us. JD was his name, and I picked right beside him. He was picking three rows. I was picking two. He'd get 350 pounds in a day, and I was lucky if I ever -- well, only one day did get over 200 pounds. But, anyway, I had weigh the cotton for all the black ladies, and all that, and shake their sacks out. So, I had other things to do besides picking, but anyway, when I got to college, I didn't have a job. So, I picked cotton by the hour. That made it a lot easier, and

the first semester I picked cotton and worked for the college to pay my way through it. It only costed me 16 dollars a month, room and board. I didn't have to pay any tuition.

EM: What were you studying in college?

AA: I was planning to be, I think, an aeronautical engineer. I took all the math that you could take. I had a real good math professor: Ms. [Pemrod?]. And, I took integral differential calculus, analytical geometry, drawing slide rule and all that stuff, and I probably took enough, and I made A's in all of that, that I would have taken four years, but in high school I did not take chemistry, and I should have because when I got to college, that was tough.

EM: Chemistry ate you up, did it? (laughs)

AA: Yeah. But, I passed it, and the first semester I wasn't very good at written English, or English. So, I had to retake that the first semester over, and I took business English at the same time. So, when the year was over, I got credit for a year's worth of work.

EM: Now, at this point, were you into flying yet? Had you done any flying at all?

AA: No. I wasn't, but I used to go around with a friend of mine, Harley [Fonder?]. They had a little airport at

Belzoni. We would go out and look at the airplanes, and talk about flying. I read *Terry and the Pirates* every day in the newspaper, and I wanted to be a pilot. I saw my first airshow at Lawton, Oklahoma. I've forgotten the year, but Fort Sill was right there at Lawton, and they had some bombers out there one day, dropping [flyer sacks?] on the side of the mountain, and I was probably six years old then, and I decided I wanted to be a (inaudible) pilot and fly airplanes someday. But anyway, at the end of that first semester, they were going to have civilian pilot training at this little college starting the next year. So, I helped build our airstrip there. It was a grass strip, and when I came back in September 1941, I took the physical and passed that, and we started. We had to go to Greenwood, Mississippi, in the beginning, because we hadn't completed the airfield there, but we flew over there in a J-2 Piper Cub, 60 horsepower. I had a couple of good instructors, and then, later, when we finished the strip, they moved the airplanes over there. I completed primary in January 1942. I had 40 hours. We went down to Jackson, Mississippi -- about 15 of us -- to get our private license, and when I got down there, they wanted to see my birth certificate. Well, I was born at home, and didn't

have a birth certificate. So, when I got back home from that trip -- I got my private license all right. There wasn't any problem with that. Then we started the secondary CPT. One of our instructors went up someplace out in the Midwest and picked up a brand new UPF-7 Waco.

EM: Let me interrupt you for just a second, Abner. Now, the war has started, and you're 20, 21 years old. I'm surprised they didn't tap you for getting drafted or something.

AA: Well, I was taking training. The war really hadn't started then. I went home on a Sunday. That was 1941, and I came back that afternoon, the 7th of December, and a bunch of us were sitting in the room, talking about flying, or whatever, and the announcement came over that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. I had to sign up for the draft, but they didn't bother me, because I was taking pilot training, and one of my good friends that I roomed with, Max [Juhines?], he and I finished the first semester. Well, he went and joined the Air Force. Well, I didn't want to do that right then. So, I continued on through secondary CPT. I got 40 hours in the UPF-7 Waco, which was really a better airplane than the Stearman that we flew in primary flying school.

EM: Now, is a Waco a single wing, or --?

AA: No. It was a double wing. It looked almost just like a PT-17 Stearman. It had the same kind of look: bi-wing, two cockpits, and it didn't have an electric starter. We had to pull the prop to start the thing, but anyway, I went ahead and finished secondary CPT with 40 hours. By then I had 80 hours, and about 15 of us, the guys in charge of us took us over to Greenville Army Air Corps base, and we all took the aviation cadet exam, and that was about the 15th of June when we finished the pilot training, and when we finished the exam, the instructor -- a master sergeant I believe he was -- he asked each one when we'd be able to go. Well, because I was sort of bashful all the way through high school, and all the way through school, and even then, I always sat in the back of the room where I didn't draw much attention. Everybody had some reason. They wanted to do this, or do that, and he got to me, and I said, "If I pass this examination, I'm ready to go this afternoon," but I still didn't have my birth certificate. When I got back from Jackson, we got school records, and my mother's bible, and a few other things, and submitted for the birth certificate, but that day I took the exam, I passed all the physicals, and the written part, but I

couldn't join up. So, I went back home, and about eight days later, the 23rd of June, my birth certificate came in. I only lived about 30, 40 miles from the airbase. So, I took our car, and I drove over there, and I enlisted that day. I had left shortly after that. I went down to Jackson, Mississippi, and caught a train, and went all the way to [Santa Ana?], California, and I got there the 10th of July, and if had gotten out the end of the war, I would have gotten a reserve commission. I would have gotten a 500-dollar-a-year bonus, but did not get out. Okay. I ended up going through as an aviation cadet. I guess we were a private, but we were called cadets. I went through that at [Santa Ana?]. We were there from July until the first of October, and we moved up to Oxnard, which was a civilian pilot training for cadets.

EM: So, what kind of aircraft are you flying at this point, Abner?

AA: A PT-17. A Stearman primary trainer. Well, I ended up with myself and four other cadets with an old crop-duster, and he was sort of older, and out of the five of us, he never soloed one of us. He washed out four. I ended flying with the squadron commander and the ops officer, and across country, he flew into a power line up at Santa

Barbara. Neither one of them got hurt, but it damaged the airplane.

EM: It doesn't sound like he should have been in the position he was in.

AA: No. He shouldn't. He was one of these guys -- going through flying to get your attention in the backseat, when you're back there, sometimes the instructor would take the stick and slam you in one side of your leg to get your attention. Well, he tried that a few times with me, but I knew that old trick, and he never gave me any bruises from it, but I could fly the airplane better than he could.

EM: Oh, man. So, how long were you up there at Oxnard then?

AA: Well, we were there for eight weeks, I believe. We went to basic training at Bakersfield, California, and we got there. The weather was bad. It's foggy, and everything else. I had a nice instructor, and I got to (inaudible), and he soloed, but then he had to have an appendix operation. So, again, I flew with the squadron commander and the ops officer, and the weather got so bad that we ended up going up to Bishop, California, to finish up our training, and we were up there ten days, and I flew four or five hours a day, part time. We finished. I came back to (inaudible) there at Bakersfield, and I ended up going from

there to Luke Field at Phoenix, Arizona, flying an AT-6 advanced trainer.

EM: Now that's the T-6. Don't they call that the Texan?

AA: That's right. Well, while we were at primary, I met a good friend, Jack Brown. He had a car. He lived in Washington State, and we drove around, and would go up to Santa Barbara on weekends. We met some nice people up there. He and I were about the same age, and we met a couple of nice girls up there. They weren't... You know. In those days, people didn't worry about... They were 13, 14 years old, but out there they grew up faster than they did in Mississippi.

EM: It must be the California sun out there, huh?

AA: I guess that's the way it was. Anyway, we would drive around all over the country. Their mother and father wouldn't let them go out at night with us, but we would go over to the house and have dinner, and they were very nice people, and very nice girls. He and I went on through basic and primary training together, but come close to the end of advanced training -- you remember Robert L. Scott, the guy that was my co-pilot?

EM: Yes. Yes.

AA: He came to Luke Field from China, and evidently, he talked to the training commander -- the base commander -- and he gave a briefing to the all the cadets, and evidently told them, "Let these guys start flying fighters." So, I was in the first class in the Air Force that got to fly fighters in advanced. I got 10 hours in P-40, and evidently some of them had come back from China, because they had those sharp noses, and all that painting on them.

EM: Oh, yeah. Flying Tigers.

AA: Yeah. Yeah. They came back from there, and I got 10 hours in the P-40. The first time I got in it, I'm not sure the instructor had flown one either (laughter), but it was single seaters. He told me, "Trim up. All the control trim in neutral," and I almost ran off the left side of the runway because of the torque. So, after that I trimmed that thing up so it'd go straight down the runway. I didn't pay attention to what he was saying.

EM: Yeah. So, tell me about the P-40. That was one of the earliest of the fighters during the war. It had been around a while. What was it like?

AA: Well, it was a lot better than flying T-6. It was a good airplane. After I got 10 hours there, I didn't do any gunnery or anything else. We did gunnery in the T-6, and

when I graduated from flying school there on the 12th of April 1943, I got orders to go down to Fort Myers, Florida, to Page Field, and I had a little bit of leave on the way. When I got back, I went to see my friend's folks -- Mike [Juhines?] -- and his father had come from Germany. They had tried to get to come back over after World War I, but he wouldn't do it. So, he asked me if I would drive Mike's car to him. He had graduated. Spent all that time up at student pilot school at Nashville, Tennessee. He graduated 15 days ahead of me on the East Coast. I graduated on the West Coast. So, he was at Tallahassee. I drove his car down there to him. I hadn't seen him in about a year, and I left his car with him, and I stayed. He went over to England, and he got credit for destroying eight Germans in a P-51 out of midair -- I think a P-51 ran into him. He ended up as a POW for a while. I think he escaped toward the end of the war. Anyway, I went down to Page Field. They had P-39s there.

EM: The old Airacobra.

AA: Yeah. The old Airacobra. Well, my first flight, I had an instructor -- [Hazerman?] was name. He was about my same size, and we went up and he started to put me in trail, and started doing all kinds of acrobatics and that kind of

stuff, and I think he thought he'd go off and leave, but I stuck right behind him and I said, "If his airplane, I can too." So, I stayed with him. I stayed down there for about six weeks flying P-39s, and then we moved with one squadron up to Venice, Florida.

EM: Now, that P-39 is a strange aircraft. Tell me about that. That thing's got a driveshaft that runs between your legs and an engine in the rear, right?

AA: That's right. I enjoyed flying it. I liked taxing it, because we can see where you're going.

EM: Yeah. It's a tricycle. Yeah.

AA: I fired both of them. It had a 37mm and 20mm firing through the nose. You had two 50 calibers -- I'm not sure they were 50 -- I think they were 30 calibers -- in the cockpit with you. And they had a couple of 50 calibers -- I believe -- in the wing. That shaft ran right between your feet up the front. I never did go out and see how they loaded, or anything, but I fired some 37s and when that thing is firing, you can see that bullet going away from you.

EM: Isn't that something?

AA: Yeah. Anyway, I liked flying the airplane. I did good there. They kept me over as instructor, and I trained

pilots, and that. One day I had five students with me, and we were out just rat racing around, and you have these cumulus clouds, and I'd pull up and roll over the top of them, and come down the other side, and I looked back, and I didn't have anybody behind me. So, I see some smoke back there. I turn around and go back. The number-two man had got in a flat spin, and how he did it, I don't know. Some people did, and you couldn't get it out. I don't know how this guy did it.

EM: Well, the P-39 was bad about that, anyhow. Wasn't it?

AA: Yeah. Because of the center of gravity was right in the middle of it, but he got out without any problem. I ran into him later on down in Panama, and other places, but he got in a flat spin. Then we switched from P-39s to P-47s.

EM: The old Thunderbolt.

AA: Yeah. We had the DCs and the Ds there at Venice, and I towed a lot of targets to gain more flying time, and back in those days, the radios didn't work very well in the fighters, and we had a runway control, and when I dropped the target, I would get clearance. I buzzed the runway about every time I dropped the target. After I dropped it, I'd climb back up at 600 miles an hour. Several times -- I was a little bit wild in those days -- I did rolls down the

runway, and I ended up getting extra runway control duty, and sometimes no flying for eight or ten days. (inaudible) control.

EM: So, they kind of slapped your wrist a little bit there, huh?

AA: Yeah. They told me I shouldn't be doing that in front of all these young pilots (laughter). Some of them are eight or ten years older than me.

EM: Yeah. Well, you were giving them bad ideas, I think.

AA: Yeah. Well, anyway, while we were doing that, we had a bunch of instructors from basic and advanced flying school come through there, and they gave us a hard time when they were our instructors at times. So, I had great big guys, and I'd tell them -- I said, "I may not be very big, but when I get you up in the air, I'm the biggest guy up there, and if you don't believe it, come on. I'll go up there and show you." And I did. One of them ended up being a good friend. He was the operations officer. Then, after we finished the P-47s, we went back to P-40Ns. That was a nice flying airplane. It only weighed about 5500 pounds. It had a later model engine in it. Ben Preston was his name. He was a major -- operations officer. He would get two P-40s in about twice or maybe three times a week, and

he and I would go out, and we would dog fight for an hour in those airplanes.

EM: Man, that's good practice for what was coming. Wasn't it?

AA: Yeah. It was. We would go up. We would break away. We would separate, go one north, one south for one minute. Then we'd turn around and come back, and as soon as we passed each other, that's when it started. He never once got on my tail. We'd end up going straight up, and he weighed a little bit more than I did. That may be the reason I could go a little higher than he was, and I'd drop right back on his tail, and go, "Bang, bang!" But, we would race around, and he turned out to be a real good friend. I ended up with him down in Panama after the war was over.

EM: Now a P-40 weighs 5500 pounds, and the P-47, that thing must have weighed five, ten times as much. That thing was a huge aircraft.

AA: Yeah. It was huge, but it was a pretty good airplane, and they good results with it in Europe. Mike [Juhines'?] brother was flying those over there, and he got eight Germans with them, and so did a lot of the other Aces over there. Anyway, the P-40, I liked it. Come October 1944, they were getting into this business out in the Pacific.

We formed a fighter wing at Lakeland and I ended up going up there, and my squadron commander -- Malcom C. Waters was his name -- I had known him there at Venice. He wasn't in the same squadron I was in, but he was a major then. We formed a fighter group there: the 506 Fighter Group. I ended up in the 457. He was squadron commander. I was a flight commander. Because we were going to be flying P-51s long range, we had almost twice as many pilots as a normal wing. I had never been in a P-51. I don't think I had ever been close to one. Well, we were picking up our airplanes down at Sarasota. They were closing the base down there, and they had P-51s. Well, I took three of my people that they assigned to my flight. We went down in a C-47, and none of us knew anything about the P-51. We got in. I got the crew chief to start it, and we talked over a few things about it, and we took off. That was our checkout in those days. Same thing happened in a P-39, a P-47, you didn't go through all these schools and all the maintenance and everything else that you did after the war was over. Anyway, on the way back to Lakeland, which was a 30, 40-minute ride, I spread them out, and we dropped the landing gear, and flats, and checked out the approach speeds, and all that kind of stuff. We came in and landed.

We trained there until January. We finished up our training there in P-51s.

EM: Well, now, let me ask you a question here. What was your first impression when you flew the P-51?

AA: Well, I liked it. It was a good airplane, but I could take a P-40N and whip it any day of the week. It had a lot more speed, and it was faster. It wasn't as maneuverable as that little P-40. I could go out with a T-6. Most of the time, if it wasn't a very good pilot, I could beat a T-6 with a P-40N, because it would turn good, and it was a good airplane. You didn't have a prop control. You just had the one lever, but you could (inaudible), going across country. You could set the prop to whatever you wanted. In rat racing around, you pushed the throttle up. You got the RPMs going up the same way. So, it's better control of power anyway.

EM: Now, this was on the P-51.

AA: No. That was the P-40N.

EM: The P-40. The P-40. Okay.

AA: Then we trained at Lakeland, and we did some long-range flights. One day we took off. They briefed us on it to fly 1700 RPMs, and about 30 inches of manifold pressure. We left Lakeland and went to Charleston, South Caroline,

back to Tallahassee, out El Paso, and on the way back, every 45 minutes, you would run up the power to 45 inches and 3000 RPMs to clear the engine out. Well, after I left Tallahassee, I did that once and the engine wouldn't clear out. That was probably the only time I ever aborted. I had to go back to Lakeland, but I changed my procedures. I didn't use that. I didn't want to be in combat and have the engine start sputtering, or anything else. So, normally on mine, I cruised around 22, 2300 RPMs, 27, 28 inches of manifold pressure, and I got the same kind of cruise control. I never ran. Sure, I came back from Japan one day. I had 105 gallons of fuel, and well I left it there, and I got back and had about 15 gallons when I landed at Iwo.

EM: So, what kind of fuel consumption were you seeing when you were in that economy mode, if I can use that term?

AA: Well, about 30 gallons an hour.

EM: Is that all?

AA: Yeah. It was good. We cruised out at 220 miles per hour, but I'll get on to that a little bit later.

EM: Okay.

AA: I went with my squadron commander. I ended up taking the air echelon. Well, he took my flight and I'm not sure who

else, but we caught a train out Lakeland, and went there to the Naval airbase there in California across the bay from San Francisco, and loaded 75 airplanes on the [Kalinin?] Bay, on a small carrier, and we left out in the early part of February. I believe it was, and went to Hawaii.

EM: Now, tell me again which carrier this was.

AA: [Kalinin?] Bay -- K-A-L-E-N -- or something close to that. It was one of those baby carriers.

EM: Yeah. It was a CVE. I understand. Escort carrier.

AA: Yeah. We had 75 airplanes on it. The hanger deck was full. The top deck was stacked full, and they had them all in [Cosmoline?], and it's sort of cold out to Hawaii, but once we left there, going to Guam, we went to Hawaii. We spent one night there, and I guess they refueled and we went on to Guam, and they unloaded all the airplanes there at Guam, and it took the crew a couple days to clean them all up, and check them all out. Then we flew up to Tinian, and we flew off an old Jap fighter strip up there.

EM: Now, Tinian is where the B-29s were based.

AA: Well, they had B-29s at Tinian and Saipan, but we were pretty close that base. At the Jap fighter strip, all we had was places to sleep and fly from. We'd go down to the officer's club there at Tinian, and a couple of my friends,

one of them -- Marshall was his name -- he was flying B-29s. I flew over to Saipan and talked with him and one other friend out of high school. He was a major in the Marines, and he was up there on the northwest end of the island where all them Japs were jumping off the cliff. He was up there in that area, and I never did actually see him, but Burt Marshall told me that he had seen him and that he was up there in that area. We flew out of Tinian. The war had just started on Iwo, and as soon as they cleared the Jap fighter base down close to Mount Suribachi, the P-51 outfit on the 21st, the 15th Wing, moved up there to that strip and started flying out of there. At Tinian, we flew some missions up against Chichijima, dropping bombs up there, and then we got 2500 feet of runway. They built us a runway on the northeast end of the island. We were due north of the P-29 strip, a little bit northeast on the end of the island there. When they got 2500 feet of blacktop runway...

EM: At this point, had you had any aerial combat issues with Japanese aircraft?

AA: No. The fighters weren't coming down in that area at all. After I got to Iwo, the day I landed there, they were clearing off our parking area with dozers and things. The

Marines had just had a big battle with a bunch of Japs there still on the island, and there were dead Japs laying all over the parking area. I walked around and looked at some of them. These Marines evidently carried a pair of plyers, because you know, back in those days the Japs had a lot of gold teeth, but the ones I was looking at didn't have any left.

EM: Oh, boy.

AA: A couple weeks later we were building up our living area, and we went down to the Marines. They'd come by, and they had a ball of gold. If I'd have known the price of gold now days, I'd have traded a bottle of whiskey for those balls of gold.

EM: Boy, no kidding. It's 1,600 an ounce now. Back then it wasn't.

AA: Yeah. I know. I bought some down in Columbia in '86 and '87 for 416 dollars ounce.

EM: Yeah. You were paying high dollar back then, but now look at it. Wow.

AA: That's right. But anyway, we got to Iwo. I saw something in the newspaper I think last year or something where the Japs had found a lot of Jap bodies, and I said, "I know where they found them." All they did was took the dozers

and shoved them over the cliff. There's a cliff off the end of that runway, and they just shoved them off over the end of that cliff, and that's where they found them. Anyway, while I was there at Iwo, the briefed us all not to go in caves or anything like that, because the Corps of Engineers would blow these caves closed, and we sat around on alert out there, and maybe every 30 minutes an hour, you'd hear another explosion. Well, the Japs down under there were blowing them back open. They were still underground, and we had a couple of Betty bombers come in at night. Our living area was just south of the B-29 strip lower down than that. Well, they had flew just barely clear of our tents, and the next morning they hit the ground before they got to the B-29 strip, and I went over there. There were three Jap bodies laying out where the airplane hit the ground, and they were thrown clear of it, but they were dead.

EM: So, they just made a mistake. They weren't a kamikaze or anything.

AA: Yeah. Anyway, while I was there at Iwo, the weather was really bad there. I remember one day we were set on alert out there, and I don't why, because you couldn't see ten feet ahead of you. Crews bailed out of 11 B-29s. They had

to make three passes across the island to get them out.

They were landing, coming down in parachutes all among our airplanes, and everything else.

EM: My goodness. Now, these were B-29s that were damaged, and weren't going to make it back to Tinian, or Saipan.

AA: That's right. I was up flying around one day, and a B-29 had two engines, and I followed him around, and on his approach to the runway, he ended up with one engine, but he made it on the ground all right. I've forgotten. I had a couple of missions I think in April or May that I didn't run. We went up and strafed. We went up to escort B-29s most of the missions, but I never saw any B-29s up there. So, we would go down and strafe whatever we saw. One day, I probably flew a P-51 faster than anybody ever has. A friend had flown one. He told me, "I buzzed the runway. I did 500." He was the same one down at Venice with me, when I was buzzing at 600 with a P-47 (laughter). So, I said, "Well," -- the crew chief had changed the carburetor on my airplane, and I had to test fly, so I took it up. I said, "I'm going to buzz it at 600." Well, I climbed 11000 feet and rolled over, did a split S, pushed up 45 inches and 3000 RPMs, and when I hit 3500 feet I was doing 570 miles an hour, and all of sudden -- "Boom!". One of the wheel

doors dropped down. The cockpit filled up with smoke and everything else. I tried to adjust the canopy, but it wouldn't come off, and I'm glad it didn't, because I couldn't have got out anyway. I pulled the throttle back and the cockpit cleared out, and I pushed it back up, and everything was all right. So, what it did was one of the wheel doors dropped down. It tore off all the [bearings?] off that, all the hydraulic system out. So, I called for an emergency landing. I had to pump the gear down, no brakes, but that wasn't a big problem. A North American came out with a thing after that. They put a placard around the altimeter, saying how fast you could go at each altitude. Well, I've never run into anybody that had a P-51 up to 575 miles an hour.

EM: No, and you know what happens when you get up there, too.

AA: Yeah. Well, yeah. I know. I've heard people talk about compressors -- not compressors. What do you call those things when everything [frees?] up? Anyway, in a P-51, they claimed they had that happened, but I considered myself a better pilot to most of them up there.

EM: Well, that was one heck of a hotrod aircraft. Wasn't it?

AA: Oh, it was. I really liked flying it. As a flight commander, we had B-29s for navigation, because they

nothing in the P-51 to go anyplace to pick up radio stations or anything else out there. I had to go on a B-29 on the first of June. You probably heard of this thing: Black Friday.

EM: Yeah.

AA: Okay. I was on the last B-29, and normally we had a B-29 for each squadron to navigate for us, and I don't why. The lead guy -- we started going into this line squall, probably 250 miles or 200 miles north of Iwo -- and the lead guy up there in that B-29 should have called back and told them, "Abort this mission," but we started closing in and all the P-51s, we [who were flying the airplanes?], they started closing in on us to fly formation with us, and we went in the clouds. The B-29 pilot that was flying the airplane, he pushed up the power and we broke out somewhere above 25 or 30,000 feet, and there was all this screaming and hollering. The P-51s were running together. They were spinning in, and everything else. My account that day, and as far as I know, that's what it was. They lost 29 airplanes and 27 pilots. Now days, they're saying it's 25 pilots and 27 airplanes, but anyway the B-29 I was on had this DU homing system. We picked up 11 P-51s -- Indigo P-51s -- and got them back within sight of Iwo, or where I

gave them the heading where they could get back there. Then about three o'clock in the afternoon, we'd gotten all back -- we couldn't even contact, or hear anything from, and a B-29 had been shot up. Evidently that had to bomb bay doors open, and had the bombs armed, and had been shot up over the target, and they came back to Iwo, and we followed it around. They couldn't jettison the bombs. The pilot was dead. (inaudible) was flying the airplane, and we followed it around. He set it up on auto-- he flew it over the island. Took three passes to bail all the crew out. So, once he got all the crew out, he set it up on a heading to go out in the northeast Pacific. Well, it went out after he bailed out. He left the pilot in there. It started making a big circle of Iwo. We followed it around, and they sent a P-61 up. I think it had a 20mm cannon. It had to make several passes before it shot it down, and when it went into the water, I know all those bombs were armed, because it looked like an a-bomb went off when it hit the water.

EM: My gosh, wow, what a story.

AA: I had a couple of missions. Up in the inland sea, we strafed some boats up there -- wooden boats. It's hard to sink those. One mission, I was coming back, and I think I

was the only P-51 with a B-29 coming back that trip. Down south of Tokyo was a big island, and I don't remember the name of it, but we were pretty close by that, and there was a Jap destroyer down there. So, I made a pass on that, and I started some fires on the deck, but before I got down to it, the whole sky turned red in front of me, and you know it's one tracer for every five bullets. So, I didn't get hit or anything, but I did start some fires on the deck, and I pulled back up and joined with the B-29 and went on back to Iwo.

EM: Now, were most of your missions not actually escorting B-29s on bombing runs, but rather independent missions that the P-51s were flying? Is that correct?

AA: That's right. I went up on about four missions to escort B-29s. Well, the first time I ran into airplanes was on the 16th of July. I don't remember whether we were going to escort B-29s, but I had eight P-51s. I was leading eight of them, and I had good eye sight. I had 20/10 vision, and I could see airplanes before anybody else did. I spotted these six Japs coming head on. We had been briefed, "Don't go head on with a Jap, because they don't mind losing their life. They'll fly right into you." But I went head on with them. I shot the leader down. The

first one, I picked him out because I knew by that time that he was the most experienced guy. I shot him down and within a couple of minutes there, I shot two more down, and actually I shot all six of them. The last one was going in the clouds, and I was going down on him, and I looked back up over my right shoulder, and here's another P-51, a yellow tail P-51 out of the 462nd. I was in the 452nd. We had green tails. Well, evidently, he was shooting at this Jap, but he was hitting me. When I called for the flight to jettison the tanks before we engaged these six airplanes, my left tank didn't come off.

EM: So, you've got one tank on, and one tank gone. That makes it kind of awkward. Doesn't it?

AA: Yeah, one tank off. Well, it evidently didn't bother me, because I've got three of them, and I was pretty close when I got them, and then I was shooting this last one, and when this guy hit me -- the P-51 -- I looked out the left wing. I had about six [rate?] holes, and when he hit that side, it was right by the pylon. It knocked out one of my guns and my compass. Well, the tank dropped off. So, I didn't have it when I got back to Iwo, but anyway, when I got back, I followed this guy that I had smoke going into the clouds. I had been rat racing around so I didn't know how

high we were or exactly where the mountains were, because it was a little bit cloudy. So, I pulled back up out of the clouds. It could have been a prop [bullet?], because he was smoking when he went into the clouds.

EM: Now, this was over Japan, right?

AA: Yeah. So, I pulled back up and there wasn't anybody there. I don't know what happened to all my flight. I didn't think I got but two airplanes, but my gun camera film showed the third one, and my flight confirmed it, but nobody else out of my eight airplanes got a shot at any of these airplanes. So, I don't what they were doing, but I was busy for a little while.

EM: One of them got a shot at you (laughs), but he did you a favor.

AA: Yeah. Anyway, when I got back to Iwo and landed, my crew chief got up on the airplane, and we had a 98-gallon fuel tank right behind the seat, and about six inches behind that, I had a hole almost a foot in diameter, where those 50 calibers went through there and went into my wing. If it had been six inches forward, I probably wouldn't have gotten back. But anyway, I went over the 462nd, and there was the yellow tailed P-51 trying to find out who had some gun camera film, but nobody had any, and it never showed

up. When I left there, I left word with them. I said, "You guys better be careful, because you're fooling around with a dangerous guy. The next guy that does that won't come home."

EM: Wow. Now, that tank behind the pilot seat, is it armored? Does it have some armored plating around it to protect it?

AA: No. You had armored plate between it and the pilot.

EM: Right. They were protecting you but not the gasoline. Okay.

AA: Yeah. As far as I know it didn't have any behind it.

EM: I understand that when you're flying a P-51, you've got to be careful about your fuel balance. You've got more than one tank. Don't you?

AA: You had tanks in the wing. You had the fuselage tank, but what you did when you dropped your external tanks, you went into the fuselage tank, and used that up, then you went to the wing tanks.

EM: Why did you go to the fuselage tank before the wing tanks?

AA: Well, I guess that was just the procedure they gave us, and it probably made the airplane more stable.

EM: Yeah. More balanced, I guess. All right. So, you've got three confirmed kills now.

AA: Yeah. I've got three confirmed and three damaged, and that was the 16th of July. I flew a couple of more missions. At least one or two in July. Then on the 5th of August, I went up. We were going up northeast to Tokyo to escort B-29s on that mission. Well, we were at 25,000 feet to meet them. They didn't show up. So, we dropped down, and coming back down through the country there, I went across a well camouflaged Jap fighter base. We didn't see it on the way up. So, I just flew right on past it like we didn't see it, and we dropped down, and I had eight P-51s again. We came back on that field, and we would have destroyed a lot more airplanes, but they were completely out of fuel, and it's hard to destroy an airplane if it won't burn. We got credit for destroying and damaging 24 airplanes on that field. I got credit for destroying three and damaging three more.

EM: But when you destroy an aircraft on the ground, you don't get credits towards the Ace ranking, right?

AA: No. You don't. You had just another -- you know -- just another thing on your side.

EM: Just another successful mission. Yeah.

AA: Yeah. A good mission. Then, on the 10th of August, we went back up again to the northeast end of Tokyo, way back

up in that part of that country to escort B-29s. On the way up there...

EM: Now, this is after the first atomic bomb, right?

AA: Well, it might have dropped... When did they drop the first one?

EM: I'm not sure, but I think it was the 8th of August, and second one was the 14th, or 15th, something like that.

AA: Yeah. I don't remember. They didn't tell us.

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

EM: You didn't know anything about it. Okay.

AA: We were a long ways away from where it had been, even if they were up there that day. But anyway, I again spotted two Zeroes coming in. That day, I went as a spare. We normally sent four spares out about maybe 150, 200 miles north of Iwo if somebody aborted, but we always somebody that didn't really want to go. So, I ended up in the fourth flight, as the number 16 airplane in a squadron. Well, the guy flying (inaudible) was a lieutenant, and he saw who I was. So, he switched places with me, and I spotted these two Zeroes coming in from twelve o'clock. They were just a little bit lower. I called them out to the squadron commander. Don Anthony was our squadron commander, but he wasn't much pilot. Nobody said a word.

So, the airplanes passed by. [Snake?] Clark was leading the flight I was in. So, as soon as the others passed over, he broke on one. I took the other, and I hit mine at 25000. The airplane caught on fire and he bailed out. So, we went down, and I shot at one other one, and when I pulled up off of that one, I spotted one down close to the ground, and Jacky [Horno?] was my wingman then. I went down and saw the broken clouds and I started down on him, and he disappeared in the clouds. So, I pulled up and I rolled over to the right, and I looked down. He was going through a hole. I didn't know he was over an airbase, but I went right down on him, and he probably was 50 feet off the ground, and I wasn't very far behind him. When I hit him in the engine area, the bullets came back through cockpit. I saw him. He threw up his hands and fell back in the seat, and the airplane flew into the ground and blew up, but the Japs on the ground in that airbase, they were shooting at me. I didn't realize that. So, I pulled back up over the top of the clouds. I wanted to get another picture of that airplane burning. So, I came back down, but that mission, the Air Force sent out instructions, and set out color camera film. They wanted to get some good combat pictures. Well, our gunnery officer had set the

speed of film -- I think it normally ran about 16 frames a second -- to a lot higher. I only had a picture of the first airplane, and a little bit when I made a pass on the second airplane. That airplane had nothing, and my wingman was on top of the clouds, and when I pulled back up on there, evidently, he thought something had happened, because he had already gone and headed back to the B-29s.

EM: So, you didn't get confirmation on the...

AA: I kept all (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) and everything else. I got back and there was nothing on the film.

EM: So, you couldn't get confirmation on the fifth one, then.

AA: They gave me a probable for that.

EM: They gave you a probable.

AA: So, I kept all those records, and in 1963, one of my brothers-in-law, Phil Edwards, had joined the Air Force and he was at Massawa. So, I sent all of them to him, and he had married a Japanese lady over there. So, he took leave, took all my stuff, went down to this same airbase, and some of the same people that were shooting at me there on the base, they signed that this all happened at 12:30 in the afternoon on the tenth day of August. That's the only airplane ever shot down on that airfield. So, he got all that, and I sent that into the Air Force, and the Secretary

of Air Force, in I think September of 1963 confirmed that probable to a victory, and that's the reason I call myself the last Ace of World War II.

EM: Because you got it in 1963 (laughs).

AA: I got credit for it in September 1963, and my personnel records show where the secretary of the Air Force gave me credit for it. They annulled the ordered the 506 had put it out, giving me a probably.

EM: Well, now I have a couple of questions for you here. Did your aircraft have a name?

AA: What was that again?

EM: I said, "Did your aircraft have a name?"

AA: Well, my airplane, when I shot down those three, the crew chief (inaudible; muffled audio), it did not, as far as I remember, it did not have a name. Now, (inaudible) you see a lot of these airplanes. You see them from the left side. You'll see some pictures of the airplanes I was flying with a lady on them, but that was not my airplane. My [squadron commander?], he was (inaudible), but he was leading the mission. We had eight P-51s. We left eight P-51s out to cover the subs and the B-29s, circling off the coast of Japan, and he (inaudible) had these eight P-51s. Well,

eight Japs attacked them out there, and the lieutenant flying my airplane...

EM: Say, Abner, the reception here has gotten kind of fuzzy. I'm having a hard time understanding you.

AA: Okay. I don't know whether this telephone is getting weak or what.

EM: Oh, that's better. That's better. Go ahead.

AA: It's better now?

EM: Yes, sir.

AA: Okay. Anyway, Malcom C. Waters was leading that flight, and the Japs attacked him, and the lieutenant flying my airplane, from what Waters told me, he snapped into a spin -- went into a spin -- never released the controls for the airplane to fly out of it. Evidently, he didn't. He flew into the water, crashed, and got killed and that was my airplane.

EM: My gosh, what do you think happened to that pilot? What caused that?

AA: Well, I don't know. I guess he was scared.

EM: Just throes, huh?

AA: Yeah.

EM: Now, tell me. Most of these aircraft that you've got credits for, that you've killed, were they Zeroes?

AA: Well, the first three were Franks. That was the latest airplane they had.

EM: Okay. I'm not familiar with the Frank. I'll have to go read up on it.

AA: Yeah. It was one of the latest airplanes they had. I think they might have called those last two [Zeeks?] or Zeroes, but they were some of the first airplanes they had.

EM: Now, your observation, it doesn't take a lot of lead to bring down a Japanese aircraft, because they're so fragile. Is that your observation, or how do you feel about that?

AA: Well, I'll tell you. Things went so fast when I was shooting those first three that I don't know, but the fourth one, I probably did fire 20 rounds, and hit one in the engine area, and the airplane caught on fire, and he jumped out right quick. The last one, [bullet in the ground?], I probably didn't put more than... I don't know whether it was even 20 that went in into that one, into the engine area, in the cockpit, that killed him, because I told you. I saw him throw up his hands and fall back in the seat.

EM: Right.

AA: So, I really don't know, and people ask me about dog fighting. I didn't really have any dog fights. I just got

on these guys' tails right quick, and the first three, and I probably shot those three down in less than three minutes.

EM: Well, that's the best kind of dog fights, when you're on their tail and it's over in a flash.

AA: That's right, and that's what happened. I got shots at the other three, but I wasn't close enough to do anything except damage.

EM: Now the flight where you got your fourth confirmed, and you're probably that you got confirmed later, what flights did you have after that, and are there any events that we need to talk about?

AA: Well, that was so close to the end of the war that I didn't fly in any more missions after Japan.

EM: So, that was literally your last combat mission.

AA: That was the last mission I flew. I got credit from 16th of July until the 10th of August, in 20 something days, I got credit for destroying eight airplanes and damaging seven more.

EM: Boy, you made hay while the sun shined.

AA: Yeah. I only saw airplanes in the air twice, and I got five of them and damaged three more.

EM: Man, that is fabulous. What about your fellow pilots in your squadron? Were any of them getting confirmed kills, or how did that go?

AA: Well, I only know one or two -- a Captain [Larch?] -- and he was on that flight with me the day that I got three. On one of the missions I think he got one airplane. The guy John [Denbo?] was leading the second flight with me that day, and I don't know what. Maybe he didn't return. Nobody knew actually what happened to him. It could be one of those airplanes that I shot down blew into him or something like that. Nobody has ever been able to figure out what happened to him, but he didn't come home with us. Some of them I think got shot. I think one or two of them got credit for airplanes, but I was the only one out of 150 that got five of them.

EM: What do you think about Japanese after being in combat with them and seeing what you saw?

AA: What was that now?

EM: What do you think about the Japanese after war?

AA: Well, I went back over there. I was over in Misawa, and various places in Japan, but I never had a whole lot to do with the Japanese people. I don't know. I have met some. My friends here have one that came over. He was born after

the war. He was a very nice guy, real smart, and he does good work, but I haven't had a whole lot of experience with them.

EM: Did you communicate much back home when you were overseas and write letters?

AA: Hold on just a second. Let me adjust my telephone. Somebody's trying to get... [break in audio] Okay. What was that again now?

EM: Okay. Let me start my recorder again. I guess my question was: did you write home much when you were over there? Did you have time to get letters or send letters back home?

AA: Oh, yes. I happened to be the one that checked all the letters going out of our squadron, and we wrote back and forth. I had a wife at the time, and my oldest daughter was born on the 18th day of April while I was there on Iwo, or Tinian, one. I'm not sure, but I got letters after that, and I wrote letters back home.

EM: So, where were you then when you heard the war was over? You were still over there in Iwo?

AA: Well, since I had shot down all these airplanes, I had more points than anybody else actually in the group, and I was scheduled to leave on the 10th day of September. A couple of guys in the wing -- they were both lieutenant colonels -

- they took me off of the flight going down to Guam, and I left on the 11th day of September. I went to Guam. I got on an airplane, and went on and came home to the United States. When they got to Guam, they put them on a ship, and they got home probably a month after I did.

EM: Oh, (laughs) they got one of those slow freighters, huh?

AA: Yeah.

EM: So, what did it feel like coming back to the States after being out there?

AA: Well, I came back to Mississippi where my mother and father were. My wife was down at Sarasota with her family. I picked her up and we went back up to Mississippi, and while I was up there, friends of mine -- big cotton farmers and everything else -- they had an airplane. Well, they wanted me to do some crop dusting. So, they had an airplane up at Memphis. Well, I caught a bus and went up to Memphis, but these crop duster pilots, they were all sitting around there. They didn't want Air Force pilots getting into their business. So, I flew the airplane back down to Belzoni, and I started out before daylight, putting out... I guess it's something like Agent Orange. You'd spread it on the cotton and all the leaves would fall off.

EM: Right. Right. Defoliant.

AA: Yeah. Defoliation is what they called it. Well, I had two black guys putting that stuff in, and I didn't notice, but when it stopped coming out, I figured it was all gone, and I didn't get out of the airplane. I didn't even stop the engine. They just poured some more in there. Well, I flew about three hours, and the last flight, I didn't quite make it up. I hit a little embankment on the end of the runway, and the airplane went up on nose. I got about an inch gash on my forehead. It broke the prop, but when they took the defoliation out, I had 500 pounds, and it wasn't supposed be over 300 pounds.

EM: Oh, boy, no wonder you didn't clear the embankment
(laughs).

AA: Yeah. That's the reason. That ended my crop dusting experience, and after that my leave was up. So, ended up going to Greensboro, North Carolina, then down to Selma, Alabama, and did you ever hear of Peter [Everest?]?

EM: Oh, not sure. Tell me about him.

AA: He was a backup pilot for Chuck Yeager on the rocket flights. He had been at Venice, and he went to China. He had been flying the P-51 version in North Africa, and when he finished up that he came to Venice. Well, then he ended up going to China, and he got shot down over there, and was

captured by the Communists. I had heard that they had cut his head off. Well, I was going into the club there in Greensboro, North Carolina, one night, and there's Pete and his wife sitting there. I was glad to see him. He and I ended up down at Selma in a student pilot pool, and they closed that, and the two of us were assigned to the fighter test division at Wright Air Force Base. Well I had been traveling around for six months, doing nothing but one student pilot pool to another, and my friend Ben Preston was down in Panama. He grew up in Mobile, and he was down there. So, I drove down there from Selma, Alabama, and talked to him about it, and he put in a request for me to be transferred to Panama. Well I went up to Wright [pat?]. Pete Everest was there. He was there with me. He stayed there. Chuck Yeager was there. My friend who went through... He was also an Ace over there. He got 16 to 17 in Germany. He was there. I was getting ready to go out and start flying the P-59. I was on my way out there to check out and they came out and told me, "We got orders for you to go to Panama." So, I ended up in Panama in June of 1946 in the 20th Wing. No, It wasn't the 20th. I ended up being the 36th Fighter Wing.

EM: P-59. Tell me about the P-59. What is that?

AA: What is that?

EM: Yeah. What is the P-59?

AA: That was the old Bell, the first jet.

EM: Oh, the Bell.

AA: Yeah. The old Bell airplane, the first jet fighter the Air Force had.

EM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. That was before Shooting Star and all that other stuff.

AA: That's right. I was going out to check out in it. That's all they had. They didn't have the F-80 yet. Anyway, that's what I did. I went to Panama, and ended up flying P-47Ns down there. When I got there, they had a bunch of brand new P-38Ls, and they put them down on one section of the runway there at Howard Field, and wrapped liquid dynamite around them and blew them all up.

EM: Oh, my gosh, doesn't that seem like a shame?

AA: Yeah. I stayed there down there until July of 1948 in the 36th Wing. We got F-80s. (inaudible) started sending people out to school. I was a maintenance officer for ten years. I went and took all my crew and went to Chanute for a six-week maintenance course, and then went out March Air Force Base picking up F-80s from Lockheed.

EM: Say, can I switch subjects to something that's happened recently? My understanding is that you are up for a Silver Star, but it's not complete yet. Is that right?

AA: That's right. After General Cleveland -- do you know him? He got credit for shooting down MiGs up in Korea, and he finally got a Silver Star. He helped get the regulations changed. In the war anybody that became an Ace should get a Silver Star. Well, he got his awarded in 2008, and I got all the information that he had, and I wrote all of mine up, and set it to Congressman Ross here in my area, and I got the ops officer who is still living out in Utah, Jack [Fulson?]. He signed all the paperwork for me, and I got a letter back from the Air Force that said it may take a year, but they're processing it. I had originally said I wanted it to be presented by the President, but a couple of weeks ago I called Ross' and I said for personal reasons, I've changed it, and I'd like for Senator McCain to present me my medal when its awarded, because I think it will be awarded and I'm not sure. I got information -- email -- back from the Air Force saying that was okay for McCain to do it, and so I'm going to send them a copy of my book and a letter, and see if he can push it through.

EM: Man, that'd be great. Wouldn't it? Wow. Well, okay. I can say now that I've interview the last World War Two Ace. Can't I?

AA: Yeah. Yeah. Nobody's contested that.

EM: Yeah. I don't think anybody waited until '63 to get it finally confirmed.

AA: Yeah. Well, you know. I also claimed that I shot down the last Japanese airplane during World War II.

EM: And I guess you probably did.

AA: Nobody's contested that either. If some other fighter Ace had done it, or some other fighter pilot had done it, he would contest it.

EM: Yeah. You'd probably be hearing about. Well, is there anything else that I can get you to talk about about World War II before I sign off here.

AA: Well, I had a good time. I did a lot flying. I had almost 2000 hours of time when I ended -- well, I had more than a thousand hours. I had eight, 900 hours in fighter airplanes when ended up going to Iwo Jima.

EM: What's your favorite fighter aircraft?

AA: Yes. I flew fighters all the time I was in the Air Force, except one tour I was in Denmark as the maintenance advisor for the Danish Air Force. I did not end up going to Korea,

and I wish I'd have, but I didn't. I flew with Danish Air Force some, but other than that, I flew fighters all the time.

EM: Yeah. Of all the fighters that you flew, what's your favorite?

AA: Well, for just beating around in the sky, I liked the P-40N, but the P-51 and the F-4.

EM: Oh, the Phantom.

AA: I flew the F-4 across the Pacific twice, one to U-Bomb Thailand in 1966 and then when I went to Da Nang in January of 1968, I flew an F-4 from Eglin Air Force Base to Da Nang, and I flew F-4s out of Da Nang. I flew 39 missions up north, but we couldn't go up to (inaudible), that area. We could only go about halfway. I flew F-4s. Then I ended up taking over the 31st Wing at (inaudible), which were F-100s, and while I was over there, according to the Air Force, I flew 324 combat missions in a year in Vietnam.

EM: My goodness, you saw huge developments in aircraft. Didn't you? Going all the way from the...

AA: Yeah. I flew everything except the F-86 that they had from Korea, all the jets. When I came back from Vietnam, myself and about eight other fighter pilots from all over the Air Force met at Bolling Air Force Base. We set up all the

requirements for the F-15, and they built it that way. I retired before it came into active duty, but from what I understand, it's a fine airplane, one I would like to fly. It would be the F-16.

EM: Yeah. Either one of those would be great. Now, when did you retire? What year did you retire?

AA: I retired the 1st of July 1972, and this year I'll be retired 41 years.

EM: (laughs) Well that sounds like a nice, long retirement.

AA: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I have never really retired. Once I retired I got involved doing work for six different general contractors, and right now I'm helping my friend here rebuild a house. We tore all the walls out and rebuilt and we're about to get through with it, and I'm living in the house. I plan to continue working the rest of my life.

EM: Well, I tell you what. I hope if I ever make it into the 90s, I'm as active and healthy as you are.

AA: Yeah. Well, when I was 80, I said, "I'm going to be this same way when I'm 90," and I am. I do exercises every morning. I've been doing that for ten years, a lot of them. I haven't had a beer in over 50 years. I never smoked. My body's in good condition. I take a bunch of supplements, but I don't have any aches and pains, or

anything. I say when I get to be 100, I'm going to be the same as I am right now.

EM: Well, there you go. I'll tell you what, Abner. I'm going to end the interview right now.

END OF AUDIO FILE