

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With  
Richard L. Hall  
Jacksonville, FL  
February 10, 2016  
Pilot TBM

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is February 10, 2016. I am interviewing Mr. Richard Lynn Hall by telephone. His phone number is 904-772-0301. His address is 5144 Santa Cruz Lane, Jacksonville, FL 32210. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Dick, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Hall:

I'm glad to help you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Hall:

Yes, it is. I need you to understand one thing. I enlisted in 1943, two years before the war ended but the Navy saw fit to keep me in training stateside until after the war so I did not actually participate in combat in World War II. I certainly was in the Korean War but not in combat in World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date did you actually go into the service?

Mr. Hall:

I was sworn in in May 1943 into the Reserves and into active duty on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The next thing I would like to do is get an alternative contact. Do you have a son or daughter?

Mr. Hall:

I have three daughters. None of them live in Jacksonville.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fine. Just pick one of them that would be handy for us to get in touch with.

Mr. Hall:

I'll give you my oldest daughter, Lynn. Her last name is Suberly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a phone number for her?

Mr. Hall:

Her phone number is 251-602-6678.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have an address for her? If not, what town does she live in?

Mr. Hall:

She lives in Mobile, Alabama.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fine. That's all we need. The phone number is the most important thing. Now, what is your birth date?

Mr. Hall:

October 29, 1925.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Hall:

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Hall:

Yes. My parents had nine children but two of them died before I was born but I had then six brothers and sisters as I grew up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Hall:

Yes. My two older brothers. My oldest brother was in the Army and he drove an ammunition truck through the various Pacific islands. My next older brother was a Navy Petty Officer and he served mainly on destroyer escorts and interestingly, he had four ships sunk from under him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

My goodness. Are either one of those still living?

Mr. Hall:

No. None of my brothers and sisters are alive at this time. I'm the only one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

If they were, I'd like to interview them. What were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Hall:

My mother was Nellie and my father was Alfred.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Hall:

We were very poor and I saw so many men coming to my house begging for food, I asked my mother was I going to be a beggar when I grew up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you live in town or in the country?

Mr. Hall:

We lived in the city of Pittsburgh.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Could you have a garden?

Mr. Hall:

That's what kept us going. My mother had a backyard garden, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any chickens or anything like that?

Mr. Hall:

Yes. On the side of our house she had three chicken coops. We had a few hundred chickens which she would dress and sell. Barter. I always took a chicken to go get my hair cut. I'd trade a haircut for a chicken.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You managed to make it through then.

Mr. Hall:

We did, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Hall:

He was a butcher in a butcher shop.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was he able to keep working during the Depression?

Mr. Hall:

He worked, yes. He had a job throughout the Depression.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did he get some meat from the butcher shop then?

Mr. Hall:

That's what he would bring home for us to eat at night was any meat that they hadn't sold because this was before refrigeration when they just had ice. If there was something he couldn't keep, they didn't have enough ice to last it, they would bring it home and that's what we would have for our meal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were fortunate to have something to eat then.

Mr. Hall:

We had something to eat, yes we were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Hall:

I went to Langley High School in Pittsburgh, Samuel Pierpont Langley High School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Hall:

In 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Hall:

Oh, absolutely. I was at a Boy Scout camp. I didn't hear about it until my father came to pick us up that Sunday evening and he brought the news to us of the Pearl Harbor attack.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you heard that how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Hall:

It was very difficult to stay in school that last year and a half.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you go into the service?

Mr. Hall:

In January of 1943 I took exams. It was called a V-12 exam for Navy Officer Training. Several of the boys got their notices that they had passed it. I never heard anything so I assumed that I had not passed it so on Good Friday of that spring of 1943 I went down to the recruiting office and enlisted in the Navy. They gave me two weeks until I had to report. I came home then and told my family I had just enlisted and on Monday morning I went to school and told I had enlisted and the principal gave me the second week off. He said if I would complete this one week of schooling I could have the second week off as a vacation. The first day of that vacation I got a notice from the Navy that I had passed the V-12 exam and with instructions to report for a physical. I took that letter down to the recruiting office and they told me for sure I didn't want to

go into boot camp to be an enlisted man if I had a chance to be an officer so they postponed my reporting to see if I could pass everything else which I did and I got sworn into the Navy for the V-12 program on May 21, 1943. I went back to high school to tell them that I was not leaving that Friday but since everything had already been turned in, they closed out my records. The principal told me, "Go, just get a job for the next month." Until I had to report for the Navy. So I did that. I went and got a job that lasted for that month and then my orders were to report to Drew University for the V-12 training on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June. That's when I went on to active duty.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

While I was in high school I had wanted to apply for flight training which was called the V-5 program but from Pittsburgh I would have had to gone to Philadelphia to take the exam and every one of the fellows ahead of me that I heard that went and took that exam all came back talking about how difficult it was, how much physics was involved in it and I hadn't taken physics in high school so I did not, I never went to Philadelphia. But then once I went in active duty in the V-12 program, which at first was just college training, and after I had been there for a few months they announced it in October they were going to give anyone who wanted a test for the V-5 program, the flight training program. Listen to this, we had 250 people in that unit, in the V-12 unit, 48 of us sat on a Saturday morning to take the V-5, the flight training exam. Out of those 48 we were all already in officer training but 26 passed the V-5 exam. They gave those 26 a flight physical and 13 passed that. The 13 were then interviewed and they selected six. I was one of the six they selected and then we were ordered to Floyd Bennett Field to await flight training. During flight training I watched these other five, one at a time, dropping by the



wayside. They'd fail or something or flunk out on something and by the time I graduated, I was the only one left. So out of the 48 that sat to take that exam, I was the only one that graduated and got my wings.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, that was very good then.

Mr. Hall:

Yes, it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then what happened? Where did you go for your flight training?

Mr. Hall:

For flight training I first went to the University of Pennsylvania for pre-flight training. Then the University of Georgia for pre-flight. Then up to Memphis at Millington where the Naval Air Station was for my primary flight training being in the Stearman. Then down to Pensacola for the various stages of flight training there in the N2S and SBD. I graduated then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1946. So from January of 1944 it took me until April of 1946 to complete flight training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was your very first flight training? Where was that?

Mr. Hall:

The first actual flight training, that was at the Naval Air Station in Millington, Tennessee, just outside of Memphis. That was in the Stearman, the N2S.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's where you flew the Stearman. That was your first flight training.

Mr. Hall:

The first flight training, that was there in Tennessee.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it like to solo?

Mr. Hall:

It was exciting. That was an exciting, exciting day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How were your flight instructors there?

Mr. Hall:

Trying to think.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were they pretty tough on you?

Mr. Hall:

It was, well goodness...my first flight instructor was Weatherhead or something like that because I know the officer that was handing out these assignments cautioned me, he said, "Don't ever call him Fathead." Which would have been a mispronunciation of his name. He just made that joke and it worried me the whole time I had him as an instructor that I might make that mistake. If he hadn't said it, I never would have thought of it at all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it like to fly the Stearman?

Mr. Hall:

Oh, it was wonderful. I just enjoyed it so much and especially when we got into the C-stage which was aerobatics. I just thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed that. But I had one problem when I

did snap rolls. I couldn't stop it instantly, you know at the end of the roll with my wings level. I always let one wing dip a little bit and my instructor there was so concerned I had two solos and then I had his instructor check-ride and if I couldn't stop that snap roll with my wings level I was going to wash out of flight training just for that although everything else was so very good. So he told me on my last two solos to really practice that. So I did. I went up and I found, I just started shouting to myself as loud as I could all the different maneuvers I had to make and with that by shouting at them I learned how to make them really sharp and precise and I could stop that plane perfectly every time. So after those two solos I went up on my instructor check-ride and that's the first thing he asked me for was let's see a snap roll to the right and I snapped it and just hit it perfect. He looked up in the mirror. He could talk to me through the gosport, through the sound tube. I couldn't talk to him. I could only nod. But he looked up at me in the mirror and he says, "Can you do that again?" I nodded and he says, "Let's see it." So I did a second snap roll to the right and again it was just perfect. He says, "Can you do that to the left?" I nodded yes. He says, "Let's see it" and I snapped it to the left and did it just perfect and he says, "You have really been practicing, haven't you?" I gave him a nice nod "Yes" on that. And with that we went on through the rest of the check-ride and I had no problems at all. Went out on the formal check-ride and impressed the instructor that I could do it all so well and that was the closest call I had through the rest of the time through flight training. I never had a problem. I almost washed out just because I couldn't stop the wings on a snap roll until I really learned how.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go from there?

Mr. Hall:

From there I went down to Pensacola and was at just about every field in Pensacola. Went out to

South Whiting Field and from South Whiting Field I went to Saufley Field with a little interim stop at Mainside in between. Then back to Mainside, back out to South Whiting a second time. Then I had the last part of that flight training which was qualifying landing aboard a carrier and I did that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of plane were you training in there?

Mr. Hall:

That was all in the SNJ except for a short period at Saufley that we were flying the SBD

Dauntless.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The dive bomber?

Mr. Hall:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But most of the time in the SNJ?

Mr. Hall:

Most of the time we were in the SNJ, yes, except the landings on the carrier were in the SNJ.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's what the Army called the AT-6?

Mr. Hall:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that first carrier landing. How was that?

Mr. Hall:

Exciting. When I first climbed in the cockpit up on the flight deck, I couldn't get my seatbelt fastened. I guess I was so uptight about it all that I couldn't get the shoulder straps of the seatbelt on, the belt fastened. The crewman that was there helping me into the plane helped me get my straps set. Once I did that, then away I went. I was excited and had no problem at all. I did six carrier landings in the SNJ with no problem at all.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

After that was when I got my wings.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was April 2, 1946?

Mr. Hall:

That's right. That was my graduation day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were commissioned as an Ensign, is that correct?

Mr. Hall:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

Then I was ordered down to Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale, Florida for training in the TBM Avenger, the torpedo plane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Hall:

I was there until October of 1946 and an interesting little sidelight there: the fellow and girl that lived next door to me, they were slightly older than me, the brother was the oldest and he worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad so he got free transportation and he asked his sister if she would go on vacation with him to New Orleans. She said yes she'd be glad to go on vacation but she suggested instead of New Orleans that they go to Miami. My parents had moved to Miami by this time and she wrote and told me they were going to take a two-week visit to Miami and I of course invited them to stay with my mother and dad in Miami which they did. So on Sunday afternoon when they arrived by train in Miami I met them. I had bought an old 1935 Plymouth while I was there at Ft. Lauderdale so that I could drive back and forth to Miami to visit my parents on weekends and that's what I met them in at the station. I told them that every night I'd come down and visit with them. So I said good-bye to them on Sunday night, went back to Ft. Lauderdale. At noon on Monday they got us all together and announced that as of that Saturday the Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale was closing. We were all going to transfer up to what was then the Banana River Air Station in Melbourne, Florida. So I had to go down to Miami that night to tell everybody that I was going to be away the second week. I would be there each night through that week but I wouldn't see them at all in the second week because I was being transferred. Now because I owned that old, old car, I was left off the flight schedule when they flew the planes up to Melbourne but they did that on Saturday morning. They flew all the planes up to Melbourne and I drove up. Unbelievably, overnight Saturday night a hurricane developed about 100 miles out into the Atlantic, due east of Melbourne and it was heading due west. So on

Sunday morning they had to evacuate all these planes that had just flown in the day before. They evacuated them all to Memphis and they said they would use the same flight schedule. Everyone would fly just the same plane that they had flown in, so I was not on the schedule to fly a plane out on the evacuation. Once they had all the planes out, that evening then they announced that everyone else evacuate the base, come back when it's over. Well, another friend who also didn't have to fly a plane out because he had a car, his car was better than mine, it was a 1938 Pontiac convertible, so he volunteered to drive his car back to Miami. He wanted to visit a girl friend and had me ride down with him. I told him don't worry about me, I'd make my own way back. So Monday morning when my family got up I had just bedded down on the screened porch and they were surprised to see me there on Monday morning. I told them I was there evacuating from the hurricane. So they had told us to just come back when it's over so my two friends were going to be leaving on Friday morning at the end of their stay so I stayed down in Miami all day Monday, all day Tuesday, all day Wednesday, all day Thursday and Thursday evening I caught the bus up to Melbourne because they were leaving the next morning by train. They had just flown the planes back in on Wednesday so nothing had been going on there so I was in no trouble for having stayed away that long. Then at noon on Friday they called us all together in muster once again and announced that as of midnight or one minute after midnight Friday night they were giving us all a seven-day leave while they got everything straightened out at the field. Listen to this: I went down to the train station. Of course I'm a naval officer in uniform. I went down to the train station and asked what the train schedule was. There was a local went through at 8:30. That's the one that my two neighbors would have been on but we couldn't get that because we weren't getting our leave papers until midnight. They said there's an express that went through about two o'clock in the morning but it did not stop in Melbourne. It left Miami,

made one stop in West Palm Beach and wouldn't stop again until Jacksonville. I said, "Well, jeez I knew of at least two dozen of us that would be wanting to get that train." He said, "I'm sorry. There's no way. We can't possibly stop that train." Then he threw this in, "You know if someone was to build a bonfire on the tracks, that would stop the train." Then he repeatedly emphasized, "Now I 'm not telling you to build a bonfire." I said, "Yes, I understand that. I understand." I went back out to the base and told everybody, "This is what we're going to do" and we gathered up every piece of scrap wood that we could find anywhere around the base, took that plus a few empty buckets that we would fill with water when we got in there, stacked up all that wood on the track. Where he found it I don't know but one of the fellows was able to get a gallon can of kerosene. At two o'clock in the morning when we saw that train headlight coming around the curve a couple of miles south, we poured the kerosene on the wood, put a match to it and instantly we had a tremendous fire. It went up ten, twelve feet. We heard the train blowing its whistle and blowing its whistle and then we heard it applying its brakes. Once we heard it applying its brakes, we poured all the water on this bonfire, put it out, moved all the debris off the tracks and the train pulled up and pulled to a stop there. Again, this is some two or three dozen Naval officers all in uniform. The conductor got out and said, "What are you fellows up to?" I was the spokesman and I explained to him that we had just gotten leave papers at midnight and we just had to get that train because otherwise we'd have to wait until the next night to get the local. So he was very nice about it. He said OK, for us all to climb on board and explained he could sell us tickets as far as Jacksonville but then we would have to go and buy a ticket for wherever we wanted to go. So when we got to Jacksonville, they pulled in. He said, "I'm going to leave." That was only about a ten or fifteen minute stop for them. But for us to go he didn't know what the situation might be as far as ticket salesmen there but he said to make our tickets



as quickly as you can and get back aboard but they will not leave until we're all on board. He couldn't have been any nicer to us. I bought my ticket as far as Washington, D.C. and in D.C. I left the train and was able to get a plane flight from there to Pittsburgh and I beat my two neighbor friends up and got to Pittsburgh before they did. Now on this visit down in Miami, the girl and I, we had been very, very good friends for a number of years before and I got brave enough to kiss her while she was down there and we became wonderful friends and during that week that I was up in Pittsburgh, I was there with her every day and on Thursday night, the last night before I had to leave, was when I asked her to marry me and she did just a few months later than that and we were married for 68½ years when she died this past July.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, sorry to hear that.

Mr. Hall:

So I've always said that hurricanes aren't always all bad. Sometimes nice things come out of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, yes. Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

That was in October and I was back in Pittsburgh for Thanksgiving in November and back up there for my Christmas leave and at the end of the Christmas leave on January 2 was when we were married. Then I reported in Norfolk.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year were you married?

Mr. Hall:

1947. January 2, 1947.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

I finished my operational training in December of 1946 and January of 1947 I reported in to ComAirLant.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You reported where, did you say?

Mr. H :

Norfolk to ComAirLant for assignment to a squadron.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

The squadron that I was assigned to, instead of being a carrier squadron, I was assigned to a ferry squadron. So I spent the next few months ferrying planes back and forth, ones that had just been refurbished there at the Naval Air Station. I'd fly them out to a squadron somewhere and I'd pick up a stored plane, usually from down in Texas. They had a big blimp hangar down in Texas that they had hundreds of World War II planes. I would pick up one of those TBMs and bring it back to Norfolk to be overhauled.

That was a difficult life for me, just having been married. I had to carry my packed bag to work every day because I never knew whether I was coming home that night or if I was heading off ferrying a plane somewhere. Usually I didn't even have time to call my wife to tell her that I was

leaving. I'd have to give somebody a nickel and ask them to go find a telephone to call my wife to tell her I wasn't going to be home that night. It wasn't a very nice way to begin a marriage. So after some couple of months of that I told my wife one night that every once in a while they would call for a pilot qualified in a certain type of plane that was needed in some squadron. I told her that if they ever called for a TBM pilot I would volunteer for it. Lo and behold the very next morning they called for a TBM pilot and since I had told my wife I was going to volunteer I did. I volunteered and it was a squadron up at Quonset Point, Rhode Island and when I checked in up at Quonset Point that squadron was VA8A. It was Air Group 7 that our squadron was called VA8A. When I reported in I found out that three weeks from then we were departing on a cruise to the Mediterranean. My wife was going to be alone again anyway. So that was my first tour in a squadron was there starting in March 1947. I had a very interesting incident happen there. At first I had to make about a half a dozen qualification landings on the carrier and for one reason or another that dragged out over some two or three days and then finally I got to my very first flight that I was going out with the squadron and the rest of the air group. We made a simulated attack on the force and then were to climb up and rendezvous at 8,000 feet over the force. So that all happened. My assignment was a torpedo run on the starboard bow of the carrier which I did and then I climbed up to the 8,000 feet. I was number four man in our division. The other three had pulled up into position and I just slid across underneath the division leader and his wingman and was about to pass under the section leader to get into my position when my engine quit. I tried and tried and it would not start. I checked my fuel. I got lots of fuel but the engine would not start. I called Mayday and they came back instantly with your signal was Prep Charley, which means prepare to land. Two, four, zero, meaning they were turning to a course of two, four, zero to get into the wind. That was almost 180 degree turn. So as I was gliding down, I had to figure

out where I wanted to be, to be abeam of the carrier where normally we were about 100 feet off the water when we start a carrier approach but I felt like maybe about 2,000 feet would be good. Well, I got abeam of the carrier and I had a little over 2,100 feet and I thought that was wonderful. I put my hook and flaps down, started my approach gliding down and approached about half-way around I was down to about 1,000 feet. I put my wheels down, continued my approach at about 45 degrees to go. The LSO picked me up with a roger signal which he held on me until I passed over the fantail when he gave me a cut, of course there was no power to cut but I tipped my nose to spill that last 25 feet or so and eased that tail back down and I caught the number three wire. I don't know, maybe some other pilot has made a dead-stick landing on a carrier but I have never heard of one. But I did as a brand-new ensign. I was a Junior Ensign in the Air Group and made a dead-stick landing on the carrier.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I have never heard of that before.

Mr. Hall:

I have never heard of anyone else ever having done that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No. You were very fortunate.

Mr. Hall:

Older, senior pilots from the different squadrons would come up to me and it was just about the same conversation each time. They'd say, "You're Dick Hall aren't you? I don't know how you ever did that. I don't know if I could do that myself." That was pretty much what their comments would be each time. I guess I became pretty well known in the Air Group. As I said I was a

Junior Ensign in our squadron and probably the Junior Ensign in the whole Air Group and I did that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the name of the carrier you landed on?

Mr. Hall:

The Leyte. CV-32.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

I stayed on that carrier for the next, through 1947, 1948 and 1949. At the end of 1949 we got a notice a couple of months ahead of time that as of the end of December 31 our squadron was to be decommissioned. So as of then, December 31, I was transferred from there back down to Pensacola to be a flight instructor. I was still an Ensign. All that time I was still an Ensign. When I checked in at Pensacola I found out later that some of the senior pilots thought that I was just out of flight training and ordered in as an instructor right away. They didn't realize that I'd already had almost a three-year tour in a squadron until we were just having some idle conversation one day and I mentioned something about it. That was the first I knew that they thought I was that young an ensign. They were surprised to find out that I already had a three-year squadron tour but I was stationed out at South Whiting Field as a flight instructor for the first year and then transferred over to Saufley Field to instruct in formation flying for the second year.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

Then during my tour there at Saufley Field, that's when the Korean War started and then January of 1952 I was transferred from Pensacola from my instructor duty I was sent over to Jacksonville to Ordnance Officers School which was about a four month training course and then off to San Diego to AirPac for assignment and I got assigned to an AD squadron. We had switched from the TBM to the AD up in my first squadron the last six months or so I was flying the Sky Raider so I was then assigned to a Sky Raider squadron. At first we were up in Santa Rosa, California. We re-opened the field. It had been closed since World War II and we re-opened it. It was an eyesore. When I got assigned to that squadron there was a training program. It made the movies later during the Vietnam War. It made the movies as Top Gun, I think it was. It was a training course down at El Segundo maybe, I think it was, down by the Black Sea, a training base there that they trained people in fighting in the jets and also dive-bombing for the Sky Raiders. So I went through that training and then..."Top Gun" was the name of the movie.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, right. I've seen it.

Mr. Hall:

That training program had originated during the Korean War and as I said I participated in the dive bomber portion of that and then back to my squadron. Initially we were assigned up at Santa Rosa. The rest of the Air Group was down at Moffett and so after some few months they brought our squadron down to Moffett and we were stationed there until we left on January of 1953 for Korea. After a stop for a week or two in Hawaii for some final training we headed for Japan. We

pulled in for our final organization and then after a day or two we headed for the line at Korea and by the end of February we started our bombing tactics in Korea. Although when I checked in at San Diego at AirPac I thought I would be assigned to a squadron right there in San Diego. That's what I was hoping for and did they have to send me up to Alameda which is where they first told me where the squadron was and they insisted they needed Lieutenants and I had just been promoted to Lieutenant. When I got to Alameda I couldn't find a squadron anywhere. I found it had been reassigned to Santa Rosa and that's where I joined the squadron and this squadron had been a Reserve squadron from the Chicago area that had made a previous deployment to Korea and then most all of their people were transferred. There were about a half a dozen Ensigns that stayed in the squadron. So we had a bunch of all new people and mostly they were recalled Reservists. So as I say I had just been promoted to Lieutenant and every one of these Lieutenants that were checking in had virtually no experience. Some of them had been in weekend Reservists. Maybe all of them had but they didn't have much training. They had never flown the Sky Raider. Most of them had never done any kind of combat training and as it turned out, we had fifteen Lieutenants in the squadron and I was the junior of those fifteen Lieutenants. But I had more carrier landings than anyone except the Skipper and Exec. It wasn't long until I passed him by and when they formed the division for combat in Korea, the Air Group Commander wanted to fly with our squadron so they formed it into six four-men divisions and I was made a flight leader of one of those six divisions where as I said I was the junior Lieutenant in the squadron. There were fifteen Lieutenants so they were all senior to me but did not have the flying training experience that I had so the Skipper and Exec made me a division commander and a flight leader. So that was nice because I had the fine young jg that had been on the previous tour as my section leader and two young Ensigns, both of whom were very very

good, very nice. So we had a nice division out there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what was the number of your group there?

Mr. Hall:

That squadron was the 1<sup>st</sup> as a Reserve Squadron. Then they redesignated it, it was Air Group 15 so we were made Squadron 155, VA155. That's what we were throughout most all of the Korean War. Now I said that normally I was a strike leader but I had one very interesting experience. I was assigned, along with my wingman, to accompany the Skipper on a strike that was all the way up at the Yalu River which was the border between North Korea and China and they just cautioned us not to cross that Yalu River during the operation. But where I was normally, being the strike leader, I was the first one diving. In this case as I was accompanying the Skipper and his division, I was the fifth one to dive. So I got the chance to watch what everyone was doing and I thought we were doing such a good job that I had a thousand-pound bomb with a semi-armor piercing nose, ten-second delay on the fuse that I just decided that I would not drop at that supply space that we were attacking. I thought it would be a waste of a bomb so I just held on to it. When we all joined up again at the end of the mission I told the Skipper I still had my thousand pound bomb and I was going to find, we used to call them targets of opportunity, something to find on the way. We had to fly all the way down from the northern border, all the way down through North Korea and I said, "I will find a target on the way down." Well, I spotted what looked like a railroad bed but there was no track on it and I had been told that the North Koreans would at night lay a temporary track and run a train until they got it to a tunnel and then they would hide it in that tunnel during the day. So I thought this must be one of those roadbeds and I followed it down and sure enough I found a tunnel. So I told my Skipper I'm



going to put my bomb into that tunnel. Interestingly, when we first got over there the first thing that we were told was that the Admiral, because the Sky Raiders had been taking so much battle damage, the Admiral said we were not to go below thirty-four hundred feet. In all of our training we dove to a thousand feet to release our bombs and would pull out at about 700 feet. The air intelligence officer told us that we were not to go below 3400 feet but we had an all pilots meeting the next morning with that intelligence officer not there and we said, "Are we here to protect our planes or are we here to do a job?" And it was unanimous that we were there to do our job and we were not going to abide by that order at all. We continued to release at 1000 feet as we had been trained to. Now at the end of every flight the intelligence officer would ask, you know, did we pull up by 3400 feet and "oh, yes, certainly we did." After two or three days he knew we weren't and he quit asking that question. Here on this flight if we're not supposed to go below 3400 feet and I was going to go down to ground level to put that bomb in that tunnel and the Skipper just called to me to be careful. I told him my wingman to accompany me down to 1500 feet because we had four 20mm cannon on each plane and we used them for flak suppression. We would be firing those all the way down in our dive just to keep somebody's head down that might otherwise be up shooting at us and so he dove down with me for that and I told him to pull out at 1500 feet. Now we dove at full throttle and with that we could get the Sky Raider up to our maximum speed of 400 knots. That's what I was diving at. I pulled out so that I was level at 30 feet off the ground and headed up that roadbed and made sure my bomb was armed and when I was close enough that I could just give myself room to clear the trees, I released the bomb and then made my climb. I was up at about 250 feet when I felt the first explosion and it was so rough it threw my feet right off the rudder pedals. That was followed by another explosion and another one. These explosions kept on going and when I looked back, the

whole mouth of that tunnel was one big black cloud of smoke pouring out. It kept pouring out. I climbed back up and joined up with the Skipper and the formation again and as far south as I could get. I could still see all that smoke pouring out. Now when we got back aboard ship I told them what I had done, that I was down to about 30 feet off the ground when I was racing in toward that tunnel and there was no question about that 3400 feet. That never came up. But the intelligence officer reported that over to the other carrier where the Admiral was and they put out an order to anyone, any flight that was up in North Korea, that far north, to report what they saw and the last flights coming in that afternoon were reporting the black smoke still pouring out of that tunnel. So I'm sure that the train that was in there had to be loaded with fuel and ammunition and I really felt it exploding. It was about a month after that that the Koreans agreed to sit down for the armistice agreement and I think I'm positive that I wiped out that particular line of supply and it may have been one of their main supply routes and I'm sure had a lot to do with the Koreans agreeing to a truce.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's interesting. What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Hall:

The truce came on July 27, 1953 and then we hung around for another month and then we went into Ypriska for a part of that time. Then on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September we were ready to depart the area for the United States but I don't know why it was but the Navy did not want us to bring our planes home. So we were to fly all of our planes over to Atsugi. Now we were...it was about a 40 minute flight for us Sky Raiders. Of course much less than that for the jets, so the jets were landing already before we actually took off from the carrier. Meteorology had given us a report that there was a stationary front down to the southwest but that it was a stationary front so we

launched and it wasn't very far to the west coast of Japan but about the time we reached the west coast of Japan, that front was really rolling in. The Skipper, we had 16 planes so he divided each of four plane sections, one at 16,000, one at 12,000, one at 8,000 and the division I was in was at 4,000. I was not a division leader on this flight. I was flying wingman to our Executive Officer. His name was Mack. It wasn't a problem for the other 12 planes, the other three divisions, because they were high enough to be well above the terrain. But down at 4,000 feet we were below the mountaintops there so we had to maintain visibility with the ground and the rain got so bad we kept getting pushed down and pushed down until we were at about 300 feet. We were trying to make our way up the eastern coast of Japan flying up to the northeast but we'd get so far and we'd get turned back, the weather was so bad. This just went on and on and on. After about four hours of flying and in the Sky Raider you couldn't fly on a 45 degree angle on formation as you normally would. We had to be up almost even with each other because you couldn't see a plane to fly wing on them through that curved windshield so you had to be up forward where the flat part of the side panel that you could see through so the four planes were almost flying abreast and I was on the right wing and other two planes were over on the left wing. Mack, our flight leader, said he was going to make a turn to the right. So being on the right wing, I had to get my power off quick so I didn't over-run them when he made that turn toward me. The number four man called and said, "No, Mack, don't go right. I'll never keep up with you." So Mack instantly says, "OK, I'm going left." With that he went into a left-hand turn. I couldn't get my power on quick enough to stay up with him. I lost him in the clouds and I knew not to try to chase after him because I could fly right up his tail without ever seeing him. So I just went straight and I called them up and told them that I had lost them on that turn and he come back and says, "No, Dick, you're right there. You're right on my wing." I was alone. I

said, "Mack, it's not me. If there's someone on your wing, it's not me." And it turned out it was a plane from the Skipper's division that somehow had gotten separated and wasn't able to get into the field and had let down until he could see the ground and as the other three planes were rolling out of that turn, this plane flew right into position that would have been my spot had I been there. We probably would have had a mid-air collision. But I went about a mile or so to the north while the other planes were heading south and then I turned so that I could try to keep that space and I figured whenever he told me he was going to turn back, I would turn. Unfortunately he didn't tell me when he was going to turn back until as I was flying down to the south/southwest one of the other fellows called and said, "Dick, you just passed about ten feet over my head." Those four planes went under me and I never saw them. The rain was that hard. So it just so happened that right along the coast there was a military base that had painted on the roofs in the bright yellow paint that it was a U.S. Army Tank Battalion. Well I decided that the best thing to do was to ditch my plane and quickly tell the field where the others were so they could search for them on radar and I told the four planes I was going to do that and for them to climb for altitude so they could be picked up on radar and that's what happened. I circled that base a couple of times and then ditched in the rice paddies immediately behind the base. While I circled they knew something was going on so they called up to the base and had them on the phone while I ditched. Got me in there as quick as they could and they were holding the phone open for me to identify myself and then tell them what else was going on. I told them to search for those other four planes which they found, led them back to Atsugi where the four of them landed safely. When they landed, two of them taxied in and parked on the flight line. One of them ran out of gas as he was taxiing in. One of them ran out of gas on the runway, seconds after he touched down. It was that close. I figured if I hadn't ditched that plane right when I did, all of us

would have been running out of gas and we would of all crashed. Maybe survived and maybe not. I have always felt that I saved four pilots and their planes by ditching mine. Unfortunately about two years later I got the report from the accident review board in Norfolk. I never heard of anyone that they interviewed on it. I guess they thought "he was given what should have been a forty minute flight and in four and a half hours he couldn't complete it and ditched his plane." That had to be a hundred percent pilot error. So that's what they put into my record. But I am confident that I saved four pilots' lives and four planes by ditching mine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, that's quite a story, yes. Then what happened?

Mr. Hall:

I've had a few pretty interesting experiences.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, you sure have, right. What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Hall:

Unfortunately because I got that in my record that I had a hundred percent pilot error on that ditching, I did not make Commander. I don't know of anything else that could possibly have done it. I had very, very, very good fitness reports throughout my career but because of that decision on the part of the accident review board that it was a one hundred percent pilot error, I'm sure that's what caused me to not make Commander and because of that I retired from the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date did you retire?

Mr. Hall:

I retired on December 31, 1963 so I was credited with 21 years on my retirement.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What rank did you have at retirement?

Mr. Hall:

I was a Lieutenant Commander.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me what kind of plane the Sky Raider is.

Mr. Hall:

The Sky Raider, it was called the AD. They were AD-4 that we were flying. Later when they went to the Air Force numbering system it was the A-1 which meant it was an attack plane. AD meant that it was an attack plane made by Douglass. That's what the AD stood for. Then they went to the Air Force numbering system and it was the first one so it was called the A-1.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It's a prop plane.

Mr. Hall:

Yes, it was a prop plane, a very, very powerful prop plane. Now I did my last squadron in the Navy, after shore duty from Korea I went to the Roosevelt in ship's company. I was the Assistant CIC Officer for a couple of years there and sitting down to the table for dinner one night, the ship's secretary came in and says, "Here's something I thought you might like to read." I looked at it and it was my orders. I was transferred to a Super Connie squadron based out of Maryland and this was a four-engine plane, radar equipped Super Constellation and it had the same engine that the Sky Raider had except now there were four of them. I had some interesting experiences

there, too. I went through the flight training program just as fast as anyone could. Became first Co-pilot and then Command Pilot and was given my own flight crew, assigned my own plane and the whole crew on the Super Connie was 32. The squadron Skipper said to me one day, "Boy, Dick, you really showed us." There was always competition between the carrier and the multi-engine. Each side thought they were so much better than the other. It was really friendly competition but here I was a carrier pilot being ordered to the multi-engine squadron. They thought, oh, he'll never do it. As it turned out I went through their training syllabus as fast as anyone could, became fully qualified as a plane commander and was assigned my own crew and as I said, the Skipper said, "You really showed us. We didn't think you were going to be able to do it." I don't think anyone could have really done it any faster.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You've had some interesting experiences. Of everything that happened to you, what would you consider the most frightening time?

Mr. Hall:

That was a nice squadron to be assigned to because we traveled with the fleet. Wherever the fleet went, our squadron went. Other Super Connie squadrons just flew a barrier patrol between Argentinia, Newfoundland and the Azores. They plotted everything that was crossing the Atlantic, surface and air. It was about a six hour flight each way, six hours down to the Azores, six hours back to Argentinia and it took several planes in the air to complete to keep that barrier patrol fully mobilized. But our squadron, we traveled with the fleet. We had detachment that would go over to the Mediterranean and wherever else the force went and in 1961 Portugal and Brazil were extremely at odds politically and there was a cruise ship that was owned by a Portuguese company, flew the Portuguese flag, but it was operating in the Mediterranean and when it

stopped in Brazil, unknown to them, a bunch of pirates went aboard that ship and when it put out to sea from Belem the pirates took over, took command of that ship and just started heading out to the east. Brazil or Portugal, I'm not sure which, one of them though, asked the United States for help in keeping track of that ship so the Navy was assigned that responsibility and my squadron sent several planes down to Trinidad to fly from Trinidad to keep a plane over that ship. The ship was heading so far to the east that it was taking about six to seven hours to get out to it so if a plane flew six hours out, stayed over the ship for two hours, and another seven hours to get back, they were putting in fourteen hours of flying time just to put two hours over the ship and it was taking many, many planes in the air at one time so they wanted to go down to Brazil to see if they couldn't transfer. So I was assigned to go down as the lead and when I got down there I found out that somehow there had been a misunderstanding between the different countries. We were using the Super Connies, the VW-2 and the P2V Neptunes. The Brazilians understood it to be one of each, one plane of each and they figures a pilot and co-pilot in each one. They had reserved a room at the airport. They reserved two rooms for two people each. Well I carry 32 people just on my flight crew and the P2V carried ten or eleven on theirs so I stopped, the Air Force had a headquarters there on the field and that's where I parked my plane and found out how poor the preparations were down there and I told them that we were going to have four to five hundred people rather than four people as they had anticipated. So at the Air Force base they recommended that we move our operation down to Recife. Recife being a very popular tourist city that had many, many hotels. So they recommended that we fly down there. I was in the process of making up a message to send back to Admiral to explain to him when the Skipper of the Hurricane Squadron which was also a Super Connie squadron, arrived and so he took over with that. I explained everything to him and told him about this message I was just



about to send. He reworded it and said unless otherwise directed, we are proceeding to Recife. With that he ordered me off to be the first plane to go down to Recife. Well, that really upset the Brazilians because they were expecting two planes to fly into one airport and instead of that we invaded them with about two dozen planes and four or five hundred people to another city. So they impounded us and we were allowed to go about anywhere within the city limits. We could not leave the city limits and we could not go near our planes. That lasted for some nine or ten days until the different diplomatic part of it got straightened out. Then we were allowed to go back and resume our search and so with that we had to start searching for this ship and we took off about nine o'clock on a Sunday night and my radar search people, they found several ships for me and I'd go down and turn my landing lights on to flood this ship to see what it was. They were mostly some kind of oil tanker or transport. Interestingly, one of them was a Russian spy ship. It had radars all over it. I got up out of there in a hurry and nothing happened from it. I didn't want them shooting at me. But then shortly after that my radar search crew did find the cruise ship that was called the Santa Maria and I raised them on the radio and they said, "Yes, I was flying over them" but I told them I had to go down and visually identify them because I couldn't announce to the world that I was over the Santa Maria and find out I was over some other ship and talking to the Santa Maria a couple of hours away. So I did, I went down and floodlighted them and of course they turned on every light they could with big signs that said Santa Maria. I positively knew I had the right ship. Passed that word on to the Admiral and arranged by exchanging messages back and forth for them to bring that ship into Recife which they agreed to do if our Admiral would come down and be the intermediary on their discussions and the Admiral did agree to that so with that, they brought the ship into port and we departed that area. I left from Recife intending to fly nonstop up to, I was going to fly first to Trinidad but

as I was passing over Surinam, we had a problem. I had lost an engine so I had to make an emergency landing in the field in Surinam and that was an experience because it was about thirty miles out into the jungle where it was pitch black. There was a very high overcast so there were no stars, no moon, absolutely pitch black. I had to fly on instruments. There was no horizon, no nothing, just pitch black and when I got about 15 miles from the airport they turned the runway lights on and in that pitch blackness it looked like that runway was hanging out in space, upside down. It was really strange looking. My co-pilot said the same thing. I said, I think when we get closer it's going to straighten out, which it did and so we landed there and overnight they repaired the engine. The next morning we flew nonstop from there up to Pawtuxet River, Maryland. That was interesting because it was about ninety degrees when we left Surinam and it was snowing when we got up there to Pawtuxet River so it was quite a weather change. But that was a very interesting few weeks. Like I said, I had many interesting incidents happen in my career.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in Japan there, how long were you in Japan? Any length of time?

Mr. Hall:

In Japan, that is operating in Korea?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, sir.

Mr. Hall:

From January until September.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you a chance to intermingle much with the Japanese people?

Mr. Hall:

Yes and approaching Japan we were wondering what kind of reception we might have you know since it wasn't too long from World War II but we were very pleasantly surprised to find the Japanese people were extremely friendly to us, very, very nice.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I wondered about that. When you finally got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Hall:

Not really, no. For the first ten years I was a stockbroker. I was quite interested in investing while I was in the Navy and I became a stockbroker for ten years but that was I found to be extremely stressful. I'd wake up at two o'clock in the morning worrying about what I might have recommended or not recommended to my customers, whatever, and it was just too stressful and just not worth it. So I left that and just went into business for myself and did that for the next twenty-some years. Just had my own company.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did your company do?

Mr. Hall:

Well, garage door operators had just been developed. They were just coming out on the market and so I thought it would be interesting if I just sold and installed those garage door operators.

Well, I didn't get very far in that when I found out that I found that garage doors needed repaired so I gradually started learning how to repair garage doors and ended up I sold and installed garage doors and then the company that was making the operators started making gate operators so I branched out into that and mostly that's what I did for the last several years was make entry

systems, you know for communities that had private, gated entrance to whatever. I did a whole lot of that sort of thing. That lasted me up through until about 1997 when I finally retired there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your Navy outfits?

Mr. Hall:

We had a couple, a few reunions but we haven't had one in some time now. I guess there's not many alive but we had one in 1993 which was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Korea and one in 1998 and I don't think we've had one since. There weren't many people to turn out for the one in 1998 even.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Hall:

I had I guess it was five Air Medals. I don't know why they didn't propose something for that tunnel that I blew up. I think that rated something but I never got anything for it but I did get five Air Medals. I was recommended for a Distinguished Flying Cross for something else but the Admiral's staff reduced it to that fifth Air Medal. I had four Air Medals and the squadron and the ship recommended me for a Distinguished Flying Cross but the Admiral staff reduced it to a fifth Air Medal. I should have told them thanks, I had plenty.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Hall:

I'm happy to have been able to do what I did. I love my country very much.

*End of Interview*

Transcribed by:

Janice Conner

Winamac, IN 46996

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Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer

P.O. Box 3453

Alice, Texas 78333

Home: (361) 664-4071

Cell: (361) 701-5848