

INCOMPLETE DUE TO NUMEROUS TAPE INTERFERENCES AND/OR GARBLED
VOICE OF VETERAN.

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Bob Campaign

Date of Interview: June 2, 2006

National Museum of the Pacific War

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Interview in progress.

Interviewer: 3-3-2-1, testing...1-2-3-3-2-1. This is Bob Phelps; today is June 2nd, 2006. I'm interviewing Mr. Bob Campaign. This interview is taking place in Jackson, Mississippi. The interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site. And if you would speak into the microphone...we're going to see if we can (unintelligible).

Mr. Campaign: Yeah.

Interviewer: Give your name and your address and I'm going to turn it off and we're going to listen to it, okay?

Mr. Campaign: Okay. Name is Robert R. Campaign. The address...501 South Laposada Circle, #256, Green Valley, Arizona 85614-5105.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay, it's my turn to...let's start the questions. How did you start get into the Navy?

Mr. Campaign: Well, the draft board. My dad had a friend on the draft board and they communicated to each other and said, "Your son is next on the list." My older brother was already in the O&I, so I figured why not. So I joined the Navy at Chicago, Illinois in the Board of Trade building. And while I was doing this,

we had to take a physical exam. And so I was sitting next to another fellow who was...looked a little bit more emaciated than I was and so he went ahead of me. He come back, I said, "How'd you do? You going in?" And he said, "No, I didn't pass." I said, "What was wrong?" He said, "I didn't weight enough." And I said, "Well, okay I got...I have a way of getting around that if you want to try it." And he says, "I'll try anything!" I says, "Okay, go out and buy a hand of bananas and then go home and eat it until you can't"...and I said, "eat as much as you can." He says, "What's that going to do?" I said, "It will increase your weight!" I said, "When's your next appointment?" He said, "Tomorrow morning." I said, okay, do it before you come into the appointment and I...I guarantee you you'll have a couple more pounds. I don't whether it's going to help you or not, but it's worth a try." I don't remember the man's name, but anyway he did try it and he did pass.

Interviewer: That's great.

Mr. Campaign: So, that's just a little side fact of what happened when I...

Interviewer: So when...so when was that?

Mr. Campaign: Uh, that was in March of 1943. I was still in college, so I...when I come to being inducted into the Navy after that, why...I petitioned for a delay action so that I could at least finish the school and then go in the Navy. And they said, "Sure, they would." I said, "Fine." So my longevity in the Navy started in March, I think it was March 3rd, 1943. So I already...when I...then I was scheduled to go in with a group from Chicago...that's where I live. But having getting a delay of a couple months, why, in fact it was more than a

couple of months because I asked for that much, but they gave me more. Anyway, so when I went in I already had a couple of months longevity over all the rest of the group which really didn't mean anything to us because we were just Seamen Second Class anyway. And what happened...I was put back into...so I went in with a group from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And they sent us first...my first assignment was University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa. They put us on a train...we went (unintelligible) to that wall. You won't...may think its funny, but I did. We had to leave from Milwaukee which is 80 miles north of Chicago. So my folks they decided well they're going to see me off, so we all piled in the car and went up the 85 from Milwaukee which is dumb. But anyway, we left on the train from Milwaukee. The train was from Milwaukee to Chicago! (laughter) I got back to Chicago before my folks! But anyway went to Iowa City. I was assigned to the 3rd Battalion which meant the 1st, 2nd...and I was in the 3rd, so it was fairly new place at that time. I'd later learned John Trend (spelling ?) was in the 2nd at the same time. But the thing about that was we had to build the obstacle course...you know what the obstacle course was? So we get that build around our group and we running and they decided, "well, that was too fast, you...you shouldn't be able to do that." So we went back and made it harder several times...anyway, we did. We had a coach...they...they had a bunch of coaches from different colleges and I don't remember his name now, but he...the coach I'm thinking about was for the swimming. And of course every day we'd get an hour or so of swimming and an hour of this and that

and we'd show up for this swimming course early in the morning when I was in the...and the first thing out of his mouth was, "Alright, everybody in the pool!" (laughter) I later found out...this was after I graduated and got my wings and was out to sea, but they came up with a device *called Dilbert Dunker*, and it was a mock-up of a cockpit. I think it was just wood. And they'd put you in this thing and was up on a big...platform...over one end of the swimming pool...but they put you when you were dressed in flight clothes and you had to wear a parachute...and then you'd climb into this rig and they hit the switch and you went down the slide. And when it hit the water it flipped over upside down so you'd be hanging upside down in the water. Well, I guess...it didn't bother me much but some of the guys it did...to be in the water upside down. And then you'd have to get out of the harness (unintelligible) which took a couple of minutes. So you had to be able to hold your breath for a little bit.

Interviewer: When did you catch up with the Squadron at...?

Mr. Campaign: Oh, well that's...okay, uh, I graduated from Corpus Christi, Texas in April...I think it was about 10th of April of 1943 and I had a civilian license to fly before I went in. Although I never said anything I think they already knew it 'cause they didn't say anything to me and I didn't say anything... anyway, that the average for flight training for us was about 12 or 13 months at that time. And I...I was graduated (unintelligible) but I (unintelligible) familiar (unintelligible) a little-size word...in fact, it was too many...maybe a year or two ago I sent to the Navy and got my records for training. I was kind of

interested in what they thought of me. Well, turned out I have a group of Navy aviators and we started out with twelve guys and now it's up to fifteen now in our group. We don't all meet at the same time, but I host...and only have breakfast once a month at my place. And I got together with a chef and everything...made up a menu and all that junk. Anyway, it got pretty popular, so by word of mouth, we're up to fifty guys now! Anyway...

Interviewer: Talking about your naval aviators.

Mr. Campaign: Oh, yeah...I...I got to go back. I still had...that civilian license so then I graduated from Corpus Christi. They sent me...Fort Lauderdale, Florida (unintelligible) transition from training airplanes to combat airplane. That's where I met the TBF. In fact, I checked in there...I don't remember for sure, but it was several days after they'd lost those four guys to the Bermuda Triangle, and they were having an investigation. I wasn't in their investigation, so I went ahead with the (unintelligible) they had for us and I flew the same course that everybody did, and I didn't have any trouble, but that don't mean much really. So that's one of the things. And then from Fort Lauderdale, I was assigned to VT-15 on the USS Hornet. Well the USS Hornet at that time, #1 had been sunk! Yeah, and so they had another one on the way, and it was due to commissioning in several months...I forget the date of the commission but I wasn't there anyway, so it doesn't make much difference. Sent me to Norfolk, Virginia and from Norfolk, Virginia they commissioned the Squadron...or just a few guys at that time...maybe five to six. And then they sent us from Norfolk up north in Virginia to what they call

Chincoteague Island where they have wild horses and these...yeah. So all we had there when I checked in was a...runways and a map for takeoff and so forth and they had started them a hangar. And for us...we were in a...a...what'd they call them...shack...more or less and was a building really. And a Mess Hall...everybody ate together; it was no difference. So in that squadron at that time, we had a fellow from Enid, Oklahoma, and I called him Stump Jumper, but that isn't what his name was. Anyway, so we were on a training hop...lined up on the runway...oh, he was first take off, and he's one of these hot pilots and the TBM...as long as the weight is on the (unintelligible) stuck...he couldn't pull the gear up...it had a lock. So soon as some weight come off, the lock opened up and (unintelligible). So we had a real gusty wind that day...he charges down the runway, and he lifted off and the gear come up and *bang*, he come slamming down right on the runway! He must have slid probably.... (unintelligible). He wore the doors off the...(unintelligible). He had (unintelligible) on the engine and of course the bottom of the airplane was all worn off. Oh, the commanding officer was livid...oh he was mad about that! So, but he pulled a smart one...he assigned a pilot to the airplane and then sent the airplane to O&R...never did see that guy...it took that long for him! Then they commissioned the...the carrier and...the...oh hell!...my mind's going...

Interviewer: Hornet?

Mr. Campaign: Hornet, yeah! And they commissioned the Hornet. They gave each one of us tickets to it, and so I asked for four tickets. I wasn't supposed to get

(unintelligible)...gave me four tickets. Well, I really didn't need four, because they assigned me to the fly-over. So, I ended up in Chincoteague waiting in the airplane while they was commissioning the thing! So I didn't get to see much. But I had invited my folks up; and then, of course my brother was...at that time was assigned to Washington D.C. in the O&I.

Interviewer: O&I is the Office of Naval Intelligence?

Mr. Campaign: Yeah, and he...he got leave to come up. So my folks come to Washington and the train picked up him at that time and they all come out. So they were on deck for that. I didn't see them until the next day before I caught up with them. Well anyway, then after the commissioning, of course, we went for our sea trials and went to...what they call shake down for our ship. So we went on...the ship went out and we flew out the next morning and landed aboard and...and we did some practice group drills and that kind of thing off of the Hornet while they were doing other things with the ship. So (unintelligible)...jets were over, why, the captain says, "Uh-huh, I'm not taking this thing into combat!" He had some problems with the ship and he didn't tell us what it was. And so he took it back to the Norfolk to get it fixed. Well on the way back to Norfolk (unintelligible), Commanding Officer called me in and of course, on the way up I thought, "What the heck did I do wrong?" 'Cause...anyway, I went in the office...and handed me orders. And I looked at them and they went to (unintelligible) or to PF-79 night fighters. And I said to him, I said, "I don't think I volunteered for (unintelligible), did I?" And he said, "No." And I said, "How come I got this?" I said, "I was just

really an Ensign,”... I...I hadn't been in the Navy that long to be known for anything and I hadn't done anything out of the ordinary that I knew.”

Anyway he said, “Well,” he said, “I didn't have anything to do with it.” He said, “These orders come with your name on them.” And I...I was doubtful really because in those days they give...one of the pilots from some place...they said that they also let him put a name on it. Well anyway, I was a little disgruntled because I was what they called a section leader at that time. I...which really wasn't much but...whenever (unintelligible) I was lead for...I was probably way back in the last section, but I thought I was progressing pretty well especially for a young ensign that's just out of school! Anyway he said, “I got nothing to do with it. All I'm doing is put...giving them to you.” I said, “Thanks.” He knew I didn't like it but (unintelligible) the one that was doing...I didn't find out till later...long later...that Commanding Officer Caldwell had drawn a blank; he called any squadron or any place he wanted to pick up pilots for this group. I didn't know that at the time. Anyway, so I got the orders. The orders give me a delay of one day up to Quonset Point, so I...and the skipper said, “You're relieved.” I said, “Okay.” So I went back...packed my gear and went down and it wasn't...few hours and we docked in Norfolk. I got off the ship and walked over to the airport and (unintelligible) away and I was sitting in the airport ready room there and a British pilot come walking in and I had seen him land. He was in what they called a PB-2 Ventura type twin-engine, but he was all wounds. So after he checked in with the O.D., why he wanted to go get some sandwich or

something to eat. So I walked...I said, "Do you mind if I go with you?" And he says, "No,"...he'd like to go. I went with him, so I (unintelligible) position for a co-pilot and with a one-engine stop at Quonset Point, and he said, "Yeah," he said, "Okay, I'll do that just to have somebody along." I said, "Okay." So we had a sandwich or whatever and went out and got in his airplane...we took off. He landed at Quonset...shut down one engine and I got out. He started up and took off; he was going up to Canada. So I ended up a day early at Quonset Point. I found out by wondering around the next day...I had...that there was quite a few people from Hollywood...actors and stuff...it was...they had a school there for surface officers like assistant to the command air...administrative more. And really that's...(unintelligible) I'm talking about. I...you know...I did the (unintelligible) thing. There was one thing about...after we were commissioned there at Quonset Point; they sent us out to another outlying field...

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

Mr. Campaign: I don't remember what's the name of...anyway, so every time we got a day off or a night off, I should say a night off...we'd go into Quonset Point and they had a hotel in there called (unintelligible) Hotel and they...they had room where you...it was just a cocktail lounge called the Picante (spelling ?) Room and they had ladies...waitresses or girls or whatever you want to say and they had skirts that were gauze...and they wear tights and they...so it was pretty popular with the guys. Anyway, so we went in there a lot. And later on...this...this is an aside. My wife died in 1997, so I couldn't cook, I

couldn't boil water without burning it! So I was having a problem and I stayed in my house after she died. Finally I had a couple of friends that lived in this...what they called LaPosada. It's a...what they call continued...

Interviewer: Continuing Care...(unintelligible).

Mr. Campaign: Care...care...yeah.

Interviewer: CCRC...Continuing Care Retirement Center.

Mr. Campaign: Yeah, and so they kept after me and even inviting me over to dinner and everything, so finally I realized...and I joined them. Anyway, and I sold my house (unintelligible) and all that stuff. Where was I?

Interviewer: You were talking about when you got to Quonset. When did you purchase...learn that you were going to be involved with radar?

Mr. Campaign: Involved flying?

Interviewer: Yeah, with radar. When did they introduce radar?

Mr. Campaign: Radar?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Campaign: Oh, heck we didn't get into radar until after we were on the Independence.

Interviewer: Oh really!

Mr. Campaign: And at night...when we up at Quonset Point...was before they still had the blackout on the east coast at that time, and we'd take off and do search flights all over the Atlantic and come back. We'd come back and it was blacked out normally, so we...I had to figure out how to get back. So one day to come back...it was all lit up! I says, "Where am I?" You know...so finally I figured out where I was supposed to go and went back and landed. In the

course of our training and so forth, we have a SBD, a dive bomber, assigned to us for towing targets...gunnery and that type of thing. And this one...one day...of course the gunnery we...we did in the day light...you didn't do it at night. And so one fellow had to do the towing the target. Well, he got in this SBD and they put him on the runway. They have the runway that went down right into the water in the bay there at Quonset Point. So they strung out the target on the runway and they hooked it on the airplane and said goodbye, and he took pull power and let go of the brakes...charged out on the runway...pulled the rope as much as he could to get the target off the runway so it wouldn't get all tore up...and he stalled out...right into the water! So they got him out okay but the parachute was soaked. And you ever see a parachute that's wet? My God, you can't lift it...it's so heavy! And so they brought the parachute back...put in on the table in the ready room, so the guys would find out how heavy that darned thing was...you couldn't lift it...it was something else! Anyway, that's another little side effect we had. Well after that, we were there a couple of months...so then they decide we're ready to go. So we climbed in the airplanes...flew them and they were pretty well beat up planes because they'd been flown an awful lot...training planes. My...the plane assigned to me had a hydraulic leak and so they gave me a gallon of hydraulic oil and I gave it to my crewman because he was down in the bottom...we had two crewmen. One was in the turret...he was turret gunner, and the other one was down in the bay and he controlled the radios, and later when they gave us radar, why he had that, too. I had...all I had was a Mama's

Rump in the cockpit (unintelligible) and all you saw was little blips. You had to interpret what you were looking at. Anyway, mine was just a takeoff of what he saw.

Interviewer: At...at Quonset...you got the radar at Quonset?

Mr. Campaign: Well, they hung it on the right wing in the bomb rack. So you don't know what's happening. Most the time it shook the (unintelligible)...it shake the (unintelligible) what we call the tail (unintelligible). And you'd take off...because every night was a catapult shot 'cause wing span was 54 feet, so we couldn't take off on the deck because the island structures stuck out. So they could put us on the two forward (unintelligible)...

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

Mr. Campaign: (unintelligible). By the way, I got a picture of the (unintelligible) plane sitting on the catapult at night and it's what the pilot sees out there. Oh boy! Anyway, I made that picture, by the way, just from memory from sitting on that thing. So, got radar...radar (unintelligible) had problems...really, 'cause almost every one didn't work because of the vibration and hanging out on the wing and stuff... later on we got new airplanes and they had radar antennae (unintelligible) into the right wing. In fact, when you folded your wings, it...it come about that far from the deck! (unintelligible)...and they called them TBM5Ns...is what we were then. Yeah, there may be (unintelligible)...

Interviewer: I'm looking in the book and I'll find you a picture of it, but I think there's a bulb...pretty sure there's a little bulb on the end...on the wing...anyway...

Mr. Campaign: Well we had...the first planes we had were TBFs but they later got what they called the TBM which is the same airplane except made by General Motors.

Interviewer: Now you were talking about leaving Quonset...crossing the country and getting to San Diego.

Mr. Campaign: So...one thing though, when we flew our airplanes to San Diego, San Diego put us on an aircraft carrier that they had a stack of airplanes and all kinds of equipment...yeah, there it is (referring to picture)...and I've seen a lot of those and...and I...when I...I and my wingman...'course we were flying those airplanes that we had training in. Mine had the hydraulic leak to it. In fact, I have the even...the pneumatic tail wheel, so on one of the stops we had coming across to pick up fuel...my tail wheel blew out, so I had to get a tail wheel. So we were at an Air Force base, so they said, "Well, we don't have parts for those airplanes." And I said, "Well, you got a tail wheel for a...what's the heck them planes...it was a fighter...fighter plane...pump...(unintelligible) pump, you know...Mustang?...something like that. Anyway, that tail wheel was the same thing as we had, so I and a mechanic went to a...their maintenance hangar. We scrounged around...we finally found a tail wheel (unintelligible). So...and I had a male, young crewman that was...for my turret gunner is what he was. But every time I landed, before I could stop the engines, he had the door open and was gone! He was always taking off like that. So I asked Chase, "Get him back in." Anyway, we called him Bobby Socks...his name was Harvey Nigh (spelling ?). Fact...I...I correspond with him every once in awhile ... email. I sent him

an email to coming here last week...trying to get him to come. Well, his wife has a business going and he helps her out, so I assume that's what happened. Anyway, getting back to this...we put that tail wheel...climbed in the airplane...took off. And before I took off, I called my crewmen, say, "Okay, fill up the reservoir for the hydraulic oil." So he opened and fill it up...he had a...I think it was (unintelligible) that he (unintelligible) in and he get in there worried to get the nose of that bottle in...put it in...back. So he filled it and then he called me. He said, "Okay." I call the Tower, I say, "Okay, I'm ready to go..." and take off, pulled the gear up and it would take half of that oil off over the side. Anyway, so when I got within maybe five minutes (tape interference). ...say, "Hey fill up the front," so he would and by the time I get the flaps down and (tape interference)...I have just enough for braking! I flew that airplane all the way out to San Diego, North Island command, and I had to make an instrument approach to land. Well they didn't give us any instrument cards or anything and he said, "You know how...just go ahead and do it!" So, I made an instrument approach...what they call low phase of range approach and when I pulled across those clouds I was over a baseball game. And I come shooting over and I look down and I can see the whites of those guys' eyes! I must have been pretty low! I don't remember what the altitude was. So I called the Tower and told them, "I'm turning the final," and he says, "Okay." And ...a few minutes I said, "I'm on final." And he says, "We don't have anybody on final." I says, "Well, I can see the runway, what are you talking about?" He says...he hesitated for a minute...finally he says,

“Oh,” he said, “just a minute, I’ll flash my lights.” And I didn’t see any lights...finally I told him, “I don’t see any lights.” He says, “Look 100...or 90° to your left.” And darned if the lights weren’t going on...so I turned...went on final...coming down...I looked up and here’s the damned big island structure of a carrier sitting right in front of me! And I said, “Now how am I going to land at that thing with that sitting there?!” So I pulled up and (unintelligible) went down and landed. And well...what happened...I didn’t know this because I was never out to California in my life before...that North Island had big cement ramps. And on the ramp they had marked off runways. Well I didn’t this, so I landed okay and it’s...(unintelligible)...I called the Tower, I said, “Okay, how do I get to the ramp?” And they said, “Just turn left!” And I said, “Now wait a minute...where do I turn to?” And he said, “(unintelligible) you just turn...(unintelligible).” I said, “Well, what the heck’s going on?” So I turned and luckily I was still on the ramp, so I come in...I come in on the ramp. I got out of the airplane...three of us got on the airplane. They had a limousine waiting for us...put us in the limousine...took us to the Ad Building...worked our orders...give them back...put us back in the...took us to the carrier...put us on...(unintelligible). So I thought well okay, I’ll get up the next morning and go up on deck and see what this place looks like. Well, fine...I got up...went up on deck...nothing but water! Water everywhere! I said, “Well I guess we’re going on our way.” And so next thing...and I ended up on Pearl Harbor. We were pulling in and they docked right at Ford Island by the runway. It picked up my

airplane...put it on the runway...put the gas in it and they said, "Go!" I said, "Wait a minute, wait...where do I go from there?" They said, "Take it over to Barbers Point," and I said, "Okay." Took off...went over to Barbers Point and landed. They knew I was coming evidently, so we landed over there and we stayed there several weeks waiting for the carrier to come in. Well while we were there, they had a training group with a captain as the commanding officer...Captain...I think his name was Griffin, I'm not sure...but it was similar to that. And so we did night flying and that...that was...I think in August of '44...to be exact. And at...while we were on Oahu they had a system where it was a code (tape interference)...commands on certain headings...made a circle left (tape interference)...circle to the right and it was confusing and they changed it every day (tape interference). So we'd go off away from Oahu over water at night like from (tape interference)...go out and intercept ships coming from the mainland...go back. So one night we took off and I looked over and there was a strange airplane on my wing and I wondered about it. About that time I forgot about changing tanks and I run the tank dry. Well when your (unintelligible) tank dry, of course your engine quits and it's just like you stop and start down. Well, I was pretty busy...I hit the emergency pump chase tanks and luckily the engines caught! I did this quick. But the guy that was in that airplane went *whoosh* right past me! Well, later on after we done the hop and come back to Barbers Point and landed, he come over to me...he said, "What the heck happened to you out there?" I said, "Well," I looked at him and he had eagles on him, so I said, "Oh, oh!" I

said, "Well, I just forgot about the tank and run it dry." And he said, "Oh, great!" ...and walked off. It didn't seem to bother him any. And I did it one other time in my whole career of flying in the Navy. I did that once...one time before and that was a little bit scary! I was flying down to Miami, Florida one winter with a group and after we passed uh...Jacksonville...we flied out over the water and then we going down...fly down along the water. Well, I was...we weren't able to land...so we were flying and all of a sudden the engines quit on me...I said, "No!" But I was pretty quick after that (unintelligible), so I didn't lose much over that. Kind of scare you. (laughter)

Interviewer: After a few weeks at Pearl, the...Independence came in?

Mr. Campaign: Oh, back to the Independence. Yeah, well, when the Independence come into Pearl, why, they repositioned...or made probation and they took off out of Pearl and then we flew out and we had to qualify for day...and night flying. We had to made five day landings and five night flying on that ship to qualify...our whole group! So we all went out and landed. And the first night I was in the first group, so we made our first five days...everybody else did...so then that night we had night flying. So we all went out at night. But during the late afternoon...night...they added a lot of...what they called scattered rain showers around...and we were operating right close to Oahu... you could see the island out there. And...what was his name?...Doolis (spelling ?), no...anyway, he was on the catapult...ship was going along...they fired him off in the catapult. Well with the TBF, we had a lot of instruments that were run by...

Interviewer: (unintelligible)...electrical?

Mr. Campaign: Not electric...well anyway, we had to cage them, so they...they wouldn't
tumble when they were shot off on the...on the catapult...that sudden jerk.

(Numerous tape interference and/or the veteran's voice is very garbled)

(Incomplete transcript)

FINAL copy - Incomplete
CD – #1852– Mr. Bob Campaign
Transcribed by: K. Matras
Houston, TX
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