

# MEMORIES OF A NAVAL AVIATOR IN WORLD WAR II

ORAL HISTORY  
#3826



AN  
INTERVIEW WITH  
LT. SR. GRADE S. TOM MORRIS, USNR  
USS TICONDEROGA  
VB-80  
BY  
KEN FIELDS

*Tom Morris*  
*10-18-12*



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## INTERVIEW OF S. TOM MORRIS

**MR. FIELDS:** We're in the Morris Conference Room of the Underwood Law Firm with a long-time hero of mine, lawyer hero, and bomber and fighter pilot hero, Mr. S. Tom Morris, and he's granted us the privilege of visiting with him today in sort of a deposition-type setting, which as a lawyer of many years' practice he's taken many of. I'm going to be asking Mr. Morris some questions to develop his history as a naval aviator during World War II.

Tom, first tell me where you were born, please, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** I was born in Penelope, Texas. Hillsborough is the county seat, if you don't know where that is, south of Dallas and Fort Worth about 60 miles, something like that.

**MR. FIELDS:** And what did your family do?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, my father was the railroad depot agent. He was a young depot agent and handled the express and passengers and all the rest, freight and the whole works, telegraph operator.

**MR. FIELDS:** Was that a particular railroad line?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, it was the branch of the Missouri Pacific called the International & Great Northern. It ran from Fort Worth to Houston. We moved two years after I was born. The second year after I was born, we moved to a town called Maypearl which a little farther north on the IG&N. My dad was in the same capacity there. That's where I grew up, at Maypearl.

**MR. FIELDS:** What year were you born, Tom?

**MR. MORRIS:** November 12, 1919.

**MR. FIELDS:** And do you have brothers and sisters?

**MR. MORRIS:** I have three brothers and one sister. My older brother is deceased. My youngest brother is deceased. My sister is living, and I have two brothers still living. I was second in the family.

**MR. FIELDS:** What is your educational background?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, I graduated from Maypearl High School in 1937 as valedictorian of the class. I went to North Texas Agricultural College, which we called NTAC. It was a junior college branch of Texas A&M system at that time at Arlington, Texas. I finished there in 1939 and I went to the University of Texas Law School. After two years of junior college, I entered law school in September 1939 at age 19.

**MR. FIELDS:** Wow. You were probably the youngest student in the law school at that time wouldn't you guess?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, I was pretty young. I don't know whether I was the youngest, but I was pretty young in the law school. I'll never forget when I went down to interview with Dean Hilderbrand. He was a crusty old gentleman, a fine, fine person. He said, "Mr. Morris, you meet the requirements for entry into the law school, but I sure would recommend you go up on the hill and finish your degree, undergraduate degree, before you come to law school, because you don't have much chance of making it with just two years' junior college. And I said, Dean, I want to get on into the law school, so sign me up. So I entered the law school, and my second year, I was Dean Hilderbrand's quiz master.

**MR. FIELDS:** I take it he somewhat revised his opinion of you.

**MR. MORRIS:** He revised his opinion. I won about all the honors you could win as first-year law student, and I was his quiz master the next year. I was in my senior year of law school in 1941 when Pearl Harbor arrived, I had been up to Dallas and signed up for Navy Air during the Thanksgiving holidays.

**MR. FIELDS:** So you had signed up before Pearl Harbor?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, I had.

**MR. FIELDS:** And you did that because you saw war on the horizon?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, war was on the horizon, and the draft had started and, of course, I was facing the draft, but I didn't want to be a foot soldier if I could avoid it.

**MR. FIELDS:** How did you come by your interest in naval aviation?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, really I had no background experience in aviation. I had had a couple of barnstorming flights that I went along as a passenger when I was a kid in Maypearl.

**MR. FIELDS:** And what were those in?

**MR. MORRIS:** One of them was in — well, they were both in old World War I aircraft.

**MR. FIELDS:** Was it Curtiss Jennys?

**MR. MORRIS:** You know, I was too young to know what the aircraft was at that time, but they were old single-engine World War I planes.

**MR. FIELDS:** Right.

**MR. MORRIS:** You know, back in those days, pilots would barnstorm. If they didn't have any jobs so they would fly around the country barnstorming. I



took a couple of flights. We slipped off. My mother didn't know about it, or she wouldn't have let me go. That was my only experience with aviation, but I knew I didn't want to be a foot soldier, so I said I'm going to try to get into the Air Force, or Navy Air, one or the other. And I went down to San Antonio to Randolph Field and took their flight physical.

**MR. FIELDS:** For the Army Air Corps?

**MR. MORRIS:** For the Army Air Corps. Then I went on up to Dallas and took the Navy's flight physical. I passed and everything was clear, so I just swore in right there during the Thanksgiving holidays, 1941.

**MR. FIELDS:** So you passed both the Army Air Corps physical and the Navy physical?

**MR. MORRIS:** And the Navy.

**MR. FIELDS:** You just decided at the time you passed the Navy physical to jump right in?

**MR. MORRIS:** I just thought I preferred that. So I signed up with the Navy, and they gave me a deferment, said you can go on back to law school and finish your law school -- I was in my senior year -- and we won't call you up until you finish next May. Well, that was the week before Pearl Harbor -- or two weeks before. And on Thursday after Pearl, I had a call from the Navy Department and they said —

**MR. FIELDS:** Change of plans?

**MR. MORRIS:** We're going to have to change your plans and you are to report to duty January 2nd, and I did report for duty January 2nd, 1942.

**MR. FIELDS:** Where did you report for duty, Tom?

**MR. MORRIS:** Went to Grand Prairie, Texas, a little place called the E Base. It

later became a naval air station; well, it probably was a naval air station then, but it was an elimination base is what it was. You went there and took enough flying to see whether they thought you could make it. You had to solo there and then do five — I think we did five hours of flight after we soloed and then took a check flight, and if we passed the check flight we then went on to either Pensacola or Corpus Christi. I was assigned to Pensacola, and that's where I went to flight school, at the Naval Air Station at Pensacola.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, was the Navy's system of training pilots different than that of the Army Air Corps, which had primary training, basic training and — advanced training?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, we had the same systems. But the Navy gave us a lot more training than the Army did. We got nearly 300 hours or close to 300 hours of flight training at Pensacola. Started off in the Yellow Perils.

**MR. FIELDS:** That's an N3N?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, it's an N3N and an N2S. We had both the Navy N3N

**MR. FIELDS:** The Boeing?

**MR. MORRIS:** And the Stearman N2S. About the same quality of trainer planes.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, these are open cockpit biplanes, are they not?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, open cockpit biplanes. We called them Yellow Perils.

**MR. FIELDS:** Because they were painted yellow?

**MR. MORRIS:** They were painted yellow.

**MR. FIELDS:** So everybody would know there was a student pilot, give him

some space?

**MR. MORRIS:** That's right. So that's what we flew there.

**MR. FIELDS:** Those were radial engine aircraft?

**MR. MORRIS:** Both of them were radial engines, both of them were good, good airplanes, very stable. They let you get away with murder; you could stall out and spin it out and everything else. So we learned to fly, flying Yellow Perils.

**MR. FIELDS:** And you started out then with helmet, goggles, and the scarf and the whole bit?

**MR. MORRIS:** Helmet, goggles and gloves. We always wore gloves. That was primarily in case of a fire. And then from the primary squadron, we had two primary fields. We had Cory Field and Saufley Field at Pensacola, and I had to go out to Saufley Field. And then after primary, then we had what they called intermediate, and we flew old Vultee Vibrators.

**MR. FIELDS:** Let me ask you to back up. How many hours did you have when you soloed?

**MR. MORRIS:** When I soloed?

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** Ten hours. Back at the E base?

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, I had ten hours flight, dual with an instructor for ten hours.

**MR. FIELDS:** You picked it up quite quickly then?

**MR. MORRIS:** You soloed pretty quickly. If you didn't solo within ten hours,

you were washed out at that point.

**MR. FIELDS:** I see.

**MR. MORRIS:** So I soloed at ten hours and then passed my flight at the E base at 15 hours and went on to Pensacola.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you have just one flight instructor or several?

**MR. MORRIS:** Just one. He was — and I remember him very well. He was a little -- a Marine lieutenant, name was Woodlock. I can't think of his first name to save my neck. But he was disgruntled because he didn't want to be there flying at that damn E-base when he would rather be out flying with the fleet. But anyway, he was a good instructor. Good instructor.

**MR. FIELDS:** You went on into the Vultee BT-13?

**MR. MORRIS:** Was that the number, BT-13? We just called it the Vultee “Vibrator”.

**MR. FIELDS:** The Vultee “Vibrator”, yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** It was a fixed prop plane. It didn't have -- you couldn't adjust the RPM.

**MR. FIELDS:** Didn't have a variable pitch prop?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah. And when you went to full speed, it had a high whine. And when we would make the circle around the landing field, the Skipper would sometimes say “fly them damn planes -- get them farther away; they're making too much noise.”

**MR. FIELDS:** That airplane had fixed landing gear, didn't it, Tom?

**MR. MORRIS:** It did have fixed landing gear.

**MR. FIELDS:** It was all metal and had a canopy that was fully enclosed --

**MR. MORRIS:** That's right.

**MR. FIELDS:** — unlike the Yellow Peril that you started out in?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you have any particular difficulties with the BT?

**MR. MORRIS:** On, no. No difficulties at all. It was just not a real good airplane.

**MR. FIELDS:** A little underpowered, wasn't it?

**MR. MORRIS:** It was underpowered, definitely underpowered, but it was okay for what we used it for.

**MR. FIELDS:** Any how many hours did you get in a BT, roughly?

**MR. MORRIS:** I don't recall. That was a short, very short period. And then we moved into what the Navy called the SNJ.

**MR. FIELDS:** What the Army Air Corps called the AT-6?

**MR. MORRIS:** The Army called it an AT-6. It was a North American, low wing, all metal, monoplane. It had a lot more power than the Vultee "Vibrator" did.

**MR. FIELDS:** Retractable gear?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, there was a lot more performance, and it was an all-purpose airplane. We used it for instrument training. We used it for acrobatic training, for just generally moving into a higher powered aircraft. A very stable airplane. Very rugged airplane. It could stand hard landings -- withstand hard landings and that kind of thing.

**MR. FIELDS:** All right. I've had the opportunity to fly a T-6 or an SNJ, and they are a good airplane.

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, you have? Well, it's a good airplane.

**MR. FIELDS:** It's a wonderful airplane.

**MR. MORRIS:** I loved it.

**MR. FIELDS:** How many hours did you wind up getting in an SNJ?

**MR. MORRIS:** You know, I don't remember that, Ken. I know when we got our wings, we had a little bit more than that. After we -- we had to make a choice as to whether — as we were approaching the end of our flight training, what we wanted to go to, whether we wanted to go to carrier-based aircraft, or land-based, or seaplanes like the old — what did they call that? Catalina, the old —

**MR. FIELDS:** PBY's?

**MR. MORRIS:** PBY's. PBY's, and I wanted to be a fighter pilot at that time, but I wasn't selected for fighters, I was selected for dive bombers, and so we didn't have — well, the SNJ was okay, but it really — you really couldn't put it in a steep dive and keep it in a steep dive too long. It just wasn't built for that.

**MR. FIELDS:** Didn't have any dive brakes on it?

**MR. MORRIS:** Didn't have any dive brakes or anything like that. So we were flying — as we got further along, we were flying old airplanes. And we had OS2U's, which are really observation aircraft.

**MR. FIELDS:** Is that a Kingfisher?

**MR. MORRIS:** A Kingfisher was the popular name for it. We just called it an OS2U. And we used that for dive bombing purposes.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, that's an all metal, low-wing monoplane with pontoon floats on it, correct?

**MR. MORRIS:** It didn't have pontoon floats on it. The ones we flew had landing gear.

**MR. FIELDS:** Okay.

**MR. MORRIS:** Now, they were primarily fit with floats and were seaplanes, but the ones we had for training purposes had a fixed landing gear. And the reason we flew those for dive bombing is you could dive them just as hard and steep and as long of a hold in a dive as long as you wanted to, and it would withstand the pull-out. It was rugged enough to withstand the pull-out, and it didn't go too fast, because it wasn't built for dive bombing; it was built as a scout plane. That's what we flew anyway.

**MR. FIELDS:** And were those planes painted blue or were they yellow for the "Yellow Peril"?

**MR. MORRIS:** They were not yellow. I don't recall. They were sort of a -- if my memory is correct, they were sort of a camouflaged gray-blue seacraft, like the regular — whenever flying over sea they are camouflaged. That's my recollection, but don't hold me to that. I'm not sure of that fact.

**MR. FIELDS:** And the national insignia at that time was the round L with the blue background, white star, and red ball in the center. Would that have been in use at that time?

**MR. MORRIS:** You know, I don't recall that detail, Ken. Probably so, but I don't recall that.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you have any particular experiences whether you were flying the AT-6 or the Kingfisher that stand out to you?

**MR. MORRIS:** No. Flight school was pretty routine, as far as I was concerned. I did have one experience back in the Yellow Perils. We were doing small field landings, if you have been through that procedure.

**MR. FIELDS:** Short-field landings?

**MR. MORRIS:** Short-field landings and short- takeoffs.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** And I had a trainer, instructor, who didn't like those short-field landings very well, so we came in -- and you know, when you put it in the high nose position and slipping it in and straightening it out just before you hit, that was a pretty precarious maneuver, and so we hit pretty hard and bounced into a fence at the end of this little short field. That's the only unusual experience I had until I got my wings.

**MR. FIELDS:** Those short field and short takeoffs were done with full flaps and you just kind of dive down to a controlled crash —

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, except we didn't have any flaps on the Yellow Peril. We just sat -- to do a short-field takeoff, you put your brakes on, turn it up to full power, and then lifted off just as quick as you could get flying speed. And then for your landing on those short fields, you came in -- you didn't make a normal approach, you came in high, got the nose high and slipped it in and hit the ground.

**MR. FIELDS:** At that time, Tom, the types of dive bombers -- you were going to be in a dive bomber squadron. We had the SBD Dauntless, wasn't that it?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, the fleet plane, the standby dive bomber at that time was the SBD, the Douglass Dauntless. And I got to fly that later on when we got to our carrier, put together our carrier air group. I flew the SBD a few hours to start off with.

**MR. FIELDS:** That was a very popular airplane with pilots, wasn't it?

**MR. MORRIS:** It was a tremendous airplane. I'll tell you about that a little bit



more.

**MR. FIELDS:** Okay.

**MR. MORRIS:** After we graduated — after I graduated from Pensacola, that was in November of 1942. Because we had — actually, we got to Pensacola in April, so we had just six months of flight training at that point. And at that point we were then ready to go to operational aircraft. Well, we didn't have anything but old worn out aircraft at that time, and we went down to Opa-Locka, which was a Naval air station just outside of Miami, right north of Miami. And there we flew the old SBC biplane, which is an old scouting plane which was used as a scouting plane and a dive bomber, it was a biplane.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, wasn't that called the Hell Diver also?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, that — well, it might have — we got over — I don't ever remember it being called a helldiver. It might have been. It was slow, not too maneuverable. It had a retractable landing gear that you cranked up with a hand crank. It took about 50 turns of the hand crank to get that landing gear up. It folded into the sides of the aircraft.

**MR. FIELDS:** That was a Grumman aircraft, wasn't it?

**MR. MORRIS:** It was — no, that was a Curtiss. SBC was a Curtiss aircraft.

**MR. FIELDS:** Okay.

**MR. MORRIS:** So we flew that, but we flew that primarily for navigational and scouting, so-called scouting purposes. We were learning how to go out and say do a hundred miles out and across a leg and return back, may have been not quite that far, off the coast, off the east coast of Florida. And then for dive bombing purposes, we had an old, old — which I think

was the first of the all-metal, low-wing monoplane planes called the BT, it was called.

**MR. FIELDS:** Was that a Vought Vindicator?

**MR. MORRIS:** No the Vought Vindicator came a little later. The Vought Vindicator was not all metal. I flew that later, also. But we flew the BT there at Opa-Locka, and this was a short period of time, Ken, just to get us familiar with — try to get us familiar with the types of aircraft we were going to be flying as soon as we got a ship. And it was a cumbersome, slow airplane, but it would dive real good. It would hold into a dive. It had a retractable landing gear which you pumped up with a hydraulic pump.

And I had an experience with that. I rolled over in the dive, a practice dive run, and my —

T he handle that you crank, the hydraulic pump handle, you stored it in a little bracket in the side of the cockpit. And I didn't get it stored real good before I started to roll over into my dive, and that handle came out of its bracket and was floating around the airplane, I was trying to dive the airplane with one right hand, trying to catch the pump handle. So that was an interesting experience, too.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you have an instructor flying with you to show you dive bombing techniques?

**MR. MORRIS:** No. No, after Pensacola, we never had a flight instructor. You were told about the aircraft, told about its characteristics, stall speed, take-off speed, true speed, all of that, but you had to go climb in the cockpit and take it off yourself by yourself the first time, so that was a little bit of

an experience as well.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did the Navy have flying school classes like the Army Air Corps did, for 41-C 41-D, that type of thing?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, I don't remember it being quite that formalized. But we did have classes, and you had classes on the aircraft, you had classes on navigation, you had classes on tactics.

**MR. FIELDS:** But you didn't have a class year and number —

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, no.

**MR. FIELDS:** — for whatever your sequence was?

**MR. MORRIS:** Not that I recall. There might have been numbers, but I don't recall that.

So I don't remember, we probably — we did night navigation, did night flights. I don't remember the hours. We probably had 50 hours at Opa-Locka.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you do any simulated carrier landings?

**MR. MORRIS:** Not there we didn't.

**MR. FIELDS:** And by that I mean just an outline of a carrier on land?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, we didn't do any at Opa-Locka. We didn't do that until we got up to Jacksonville.

After we left Opa-Locka, we still didn't have a ship ready or didn't have any aircraft yet to fly, so we went up to Jackson, Florida, where there was another naval air station, and we went out to a field called Cecil Field, and we did some more practicing there. We had the Vought Vindicator there, which was another low-wing dive bomber, but it was not all metal. It had some fabric on the top side of the wing, and it was — it would dive

pretty good. It was — it was a slow aircraft, a slow airplane.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did that airplane have the nickname Wind Indicator, or is that another one?

**MR. MORRIS:** I don't remember that. We called it the Vought Vindicator. I remember that. Is that correct? I believe that was what we called it. And that's where I had my terrible experience of a mid-air collision and survived a mid-air collision.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tell me about that, Tom.

**MR. MORRIS:** We were on a practice dive bombing run, and somehow we had finished the run. We had a nine plane group that went out that day, and we were all making dive bomb practice runs on a little target field down there.

**MR. FIELDS:** Were you doing that simultaneously as a group?

**MR. MORRIS:** No. You would roll over and inch along and take off and stagger one behind the other, and we would go and make the drops and then make a high speed --simulating a high-speed rendezvous. So after you made the dive bomb run, everybody is supposed to rendezvous back into the sections. And somehow, I don't know how it happened, during the rendezvous, another pilot and I just didn't see each other, and we had a collision. He bailed out, got out okay. And I tried to land my plane. I didn't have any power. The power was gone, and I didn't have very good control. I had aileron control and I had elevator control. As I remember my rudder didn't work very well.

But anyway, I tried to land the airplane on this small field which we were using as a dive bombing target, and I couldn't get it on the ground and I flew into the pine trees at the end of the field and crashed through the pine

trees. I had some pretty serious injuries and was in the hospital for nearly six months following that.

**MR. FIELDS:** What was the altitude of your aircraft when you hit the pine trees; how high up were you?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, I was right at the ground. I nearly got it on the ground. I didn't quite get it on the ground before I hit the pine trees. So I went into the base of the pine trees.

**MR. FIELDS:** Wow. When your aircraft — the two aircraft struck each other, what portions of your aircraft struck each other?

**MR. MORRIS:** We came together kind of side to side, kind of scooting. I don't remember whether I was in first or he was in — he was joining on me as we were trying to rendezvous and somehow we just made contact. My prop came off. My prop — well, it didn't come off. It broke. It hit part of his airplane. I don't know what part it hit, but it was enough that he couldn't fly his plane. Stopped — I don't know whether his engine quit or what, but he bailed out and got out all right.

**MR. FIELDS:** I've done a little formation flying, and it's real easy to get into somebody when you're tucked in that close.

**MR. MORRIS:** Particularly if you don't see them, if you don't see them, then something happens. If you have visibility, like if you're coming in and you're making a good rendezvous and you're moving into formation, that's easy to control. But when you don't see the other guy, it's just bam, you've had a collision.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tell me about the crash itself. What happened?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, I flew into the pine trees. I don't know exactly what

happened. I know I was — my left leg was crushed and my left foot and my left leg was crushed. I was thrown out of the airplane. The whole cockpit came out from the aircraft. The wings both came off in the pine trees, both came off. The plane flipped over, and I got -- I was thrown out somehow. So I was lying out there in the field unconscious and my leg broken, my head cut and so on and so on.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, did those aircraft have an aiming sight or a gun sight?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes we did, we had the old long type gun sight, and I'm sure when we collided my head went forward and hit the gun sight, broke my goggles, my eyes were full of blood, my head was cut, so I flew down in that condition and survived as the Lord was with me.

**MR. FIELDS:** Do you remember anything about being picked up after the crash?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, I do. I remember that. I know I was unconscious for awhile and came to, I was still in the seat with my safety harness on. The cockpit — my seat came out, and I was still in my seat. I knew I was hurt real bad, but I kind of passed in and out, in and out of consciousness until the guys got there and picked me up.

**MR. FIELDS:** Those seats weren't designed to come out. It's not like it was an ejection seat.

**MR. MORRIS:** It wasn't designed. It came out as a part of the crash.

**MR. FIELDS:** How long was it before they got you to the hospital?

**MR. MORRIS:** It seemed like a long time, but I'm sure it was not very long, because they got me out there and by that time I was, I guess, pretty well in shock from loss of blood and so on. But I got on in to the hospital, and I

was pretty well aware of what was going on at that point. So they got me — got my leg stretched out and repaired, put in a cast. And, of course, in those days you didn't have all of the techniques that you have today, so it was just put in a cast. It didn't heal very well. I had to have it redone after about three months. Had to take the cast off and put pins through my ankle and so on. So I spent a long time in the hospital before I got out.

**MR. FIELDS:** Having spent a little time in the hospital, it doesn't take long until you're weak as a kitten, and your muscles atrophy.

**MR. MORRIS:** That's right. And when you're in the bed, you can't do anything, and it was — oh I don't remember the time on that, Ken, too well, but I was in the bed at least two months before I ever got out of bed at all, then I had to have my leg redone. I had a real good orthopedic surgeon who looked after it, so I recovered.

**MR. FIELDS:** Well, the injuries sound horrible, and the recovery sounds horrible. It was an ordeal, I know.

**MR. MORRIS:** It was a pretty good accident, pretty bad accident, and I survived it and I went on. After I got -- after I finally got so I could walk, I got a little vacation. The first time I had any leave since I had been in the service, and I had a sweetheart. We got married waiting on that, and I went back to the hospital and had to stay in the hospital another couple of months for rehab and so on before I went back to flying.

So I was finally released and went back to Pensacola, took a little refresher, and then I instructed for about a hundred hours at Pensacola. I had an interesting experience as an instructor. We had a lot of the British Naval Air people who were training with us. We were providing training

for them, and I had a couple of British Cadets who were students of mine, and I took them through the SNJ period of acrobatics and so on, instruments and all of that.

**MR. FIELDS:** You were instructing in SNJ's at Pensacola?

**MR. MORRIS:** SNJ's at Pensacola. And then when I finished that, we had a squadron ready to organize. And Air Group 80 organized beginning in December of 1943. My plane crash was January 30, 1943, and we started organizing Air Group 80 in December. It was 1943, and we started putting Air Group 80 together in December 1943.

**MR. FIELDS:** And Air Group 80 was the entire compliment of aircraft, fighting aircraft that were going to be stationed on the Ticonderoga; is that correct?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, we started off just organizing a squadron. You know an air group is composed of the fighter squadron, which normal at that time was 36 aircraft, and a dive bomber squadron was 36 aircraft, and torpedo was 18.

We didn't have any new planes yet. And our group, we were at Wildwood, New Jersey, for our station to put the dive bomber squadron together, and we were flying SBD's, old worn-out SBD's at that time that had been in the fleet or whatever. So that's what we were flying. We knew we were going to get the new SB2C Helldiver, but we started off with the SBD.

**MR. FIELDS:** The Douglas Dauntless?

**MR. MORRIS:** That's true.

**MR. FIELDS:** You were probably flying Dauntlesses that had been flown at



Coral Sea, Guadalcanal, Midway.

**MR. MORRIS:** No telling where they had been. They were all worn out. I remember one dive bombing run. The SBD had dive brakes, split perforated dive flaps, and when you started the dive, you popped your dive flaps, of course. And I rolled over and started down, and I couldn't hold, couldn't hold the aircraft on line. It tended to rotate. We had our gunners assigned at that time.

My gunner's name was Griffin, a young kid just as nice as he could be. He called me on my intercom and says, "Mr. Morris, our right flap is not working."

So I looked out there — no, it's the other way around. The left flap had not opened. The right flap had opened, directly opened, but the left one would not, so I couldn't hold the aircraft straight, but I had to bring that thing around. I couldn't get it to close. So I had to bring that thing around and land it with one dive brake open and the other one clean.

**MR. FIELDS:** Good grief.

**MR. MORRIS:** And that was not too easy to do. So I had to fly it in there halfway in a banked position, because you couldn't hold it straight, so I just held it against that brake.

**MR. FIELDS:** Gosh, I can imagine. Those dive brakes are huge, and the drag they create.

**MR. MORRIS:** They weren't so big on the SBD. They were relatively narrow. The dive brake was — oh, it was about like 8, 10 inches maybe, and they are slotted so that air would come through it.

**MR. FIELDS:** But the drag that would create to that aircraft would be huge?

**MR. MORRIS:** The drag creates tremendous instability.

**MR. FIELDS:** What angle, Tom — whenever you nosed over, what angle would you customarily take in an SBD?

**MR. MORRIS:** We tried to take a 70 degree dive. We really would be steeper than that sometimes. But to hold it straight and really stay on a target, about 70 degrees is what we tried to reach as we went down. That's — that feels like it's vertical.

**MR. FIELDS:** I was going to say that you had to feel like you were just in a vertical dive.

**MR. MORRIS:** You feel like you're headed straight into the ground.

**MR. FIELDS:** And you would pull out at about what altitude?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, you try to do your drop at about 2,000 feet, sometimes a little less, sometimes a little bit more, depending on your target and so on. But normal was drop at about 2,000 feet.

With the SBD you could go lower than that, because it wasn't high speed airplane, even at the bottom of the dive, particularly with the dive brakes on or the dive flaps open, you probably wouldn't hit more than about 200 knots, something like that. So the pull-out was much easier with that than it was with the Helldiver.

But that's what — you would keep it in a, roughly, a 70-degree dive until you reached the drop point, then you would pull it up and try to get pulled out.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you have a manual drop, bomb-drop mechanism or a automated?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, no. We had a — well, let me —no, we had a — we had a pickle on the stick. Don't hold me to that. I don't frankly remember on the SBD whether we — when we got the SB2C we had a pickle on the control sticks so you could handle your machine guns and your bomb drop all right there with one hand.

**MR. FIELDS:** And you were practicing with, what, 500-pound bombs, or do you recall?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, mostly the practice was done with just little miniature bombs. Well, we didn't have — we didn't get much practice with any live, full-sized 500-pound bombs, so it was simulated.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, would an SBD carry one single 500-pounder under the belly and smaller ones on the wings?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, SBD, they took a 500-pounder under each wing.

**MR. MORRIS:** We didn't fly the SBD very long. We soon got our new SB2C's, got our new Helldivers.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, what did you think of the SBD?

**MR. MORRIS:** I thought it was — it was a pilot's airplane. It was easy to fly. You could get away with murder. It would — well, it would just perform.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** It was a pilot's airplane.

**MR. FIELDS:** Then you received new SB2C Helldivers?

**MR. MORRIS:** Then we got our SB2C's, and those were, of course, much faster. I think the SB2C was probably 100 knots faster than the SBD, if my memory is right, but it was much faster. It also had dive brakes, but

they were cleaner than the SBD.

**MR. FIELDS:** It was a much bigger plane?

**MR. MORRIS:** A much bigger aircraft. We could carry — it carried -- it would carry up to a 1,000 pound bomb in the bomb bay. We had no bomb bay on the SBD. It would also carry a couple of 500's under the wings.

**MR. FIELDS:** You had a bomb bay in the SB2C?

**MR. MORRIS:** SB2C, yes.

**MR. FIELDS:** Not in the SBD?

**MR. MORRIS:** Not in the SBD no. The SBD was all outside the aircraft.

**MR. FIELDS:** What did you think about the SB2C Curtiss Helldiver?

**MR. MORRIS:** It was harder to fly. It was heavier on the controls. I personally didn't like the SB2C too well. It was more like driving a truck than flying an airplane to me, although its performance was great. It was faster, much faster. It would — you could still dive at 70 degrees or so. You could hit -- you would hit at least 100 miles an hour faster in the dive than you did with the SBD, and we even got to the point that we would not — we would dive them clean without the air brakes, without the air brakes at all.

**MR. FIELDS:** Really?

**MR. MORRIS:** Because of higher speeds.

**MR. FIELDS:** Right.

**MR. MORRIS:** You get a steeper dive, higher speed, faster getaway.

**MR. FIELDS:** That would be something, I would think, you have to ease into.

You wouldn't —

**MR. MORRIS:** We do. You have to just try. And we also used to always dive with the — to start off, we would always dive with the cockpits open.

**MR. FIELDS:** Because of the humidity and the —

**MR. MORRIS:** No, just — I don't know what it was. It was just the way we did it. I suppose it was the theory that if something happened you could get out easier --

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** -- than if you had the cockpit closed.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you ever have any trouble with your cockpit canopy glass getting -- collecting moisture on it when you changed temperature in a dive?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, I don't remember having that experience. But we got so we would dive it clean and also closed the cockpit so it would go down clean.

**MR. FIELDS:** Do you remember any of the nicknames that were given to the Helldiver, perhaps not so affectionate?

**MR. MORRIS:** The Beast.

**MR. FIELDS:** The Beast?

**MR. MORRIS:** The primary name, we called it The Beast. It was a tough -- it was a good, tough airplane. Good, tough airplane, but I just -- it didn't suit me too well.

**MR. FIELDS:** I've read also they called it the Big-Tailed Beast?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, I've heard those terms. If you will see those pictures over there, it had a great big tail on it and so --

**MR. FIELDS:** And I've also read it was sometimes referred to as "Son-of-a-Bitch

Second Class?"

**MR. MORRIS:** I never heard that.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you then begin carrier qualifications in the Helldiver?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes. We were assigned – our ship was going to be the new Ticonderoga, which was an Essex class Carrier.

It started out when its hull was laid, it was going to be the Hancock, but somewhere along the line the name got changed from Hancock to Ticonderoga and the Hancock was renamed later on —

**MR. FIELDS:** There was another Hancock, wasn't there?

**MR. MORRIS:** The actual Hancock that was commissioned came after the Ticonderoga.

Ticonderoga was CV-14. You know, the carriers had numbers. Ticonderoga was CV-14 and the Hancock was CV-19.

So the Ticonderoga, if my memory is correct, was launched at Newport News across the bay from — Chesapeake Bay — from Norfolk about April of 1944, I guess. Don't hold me to that.

**MR. FIELDS:** February 7th, February 7th, 1944, according to the research I did —

**MR. MORRIS:** Okay. That's probably more correct. Because when we commissioned the ship, I guess it was in April that we commissioned the ship at Newport News.

The air group had been assigned, and we had been moved down from -- well, the fighter group had organized at Cape May, New Jersey; and the torpedo group I think up at Atlantic City. Maybe that — I'm not sure about that. But anyway, the Air Group had been moved down to Oceana,

Virginia, which is an air field there at Norfolk. And the ship was commissioned over at Newport News, and we went aboard the ship after it was commissioned.

**MR. FIELDS:** And the Navy had a nomenclature you refer to the Ticonderoga as CV-14, and does that mean —

**MR. MORRIS:** Carrier.

**MR. FIELDS:** “C” means carrier?

**MR. MORRIS:** Carrier. The V means simply a line, a Navy line vessel, capital ship you might call it. And the C was a carrier, a carrier general — I've forgotten the terminology on that, what the V actually stood for.

**MR. FIELDS:** Your squadron that you were initially with was VB-80?

**MR. MORRIS:** VB-80.

**MR. FIELDS:** B stood for bombing; is that right?

**MR. MORRIS:** B stood for bombing, and VF, the VF was the fighter squadron.

**MR. FIELDS:** Fighting. VT would be torpedo.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, the torpedo, VT.

**MR. FIELDS:** And did you have a VS for scouting also?

**MR. MORRIS:** No. No, the SB2C, the dive bomber was also the scout plane.

**MR. FIELDS:** Okay. And when you —

**MR. MORRIS:** That's what the SB, Scout Bomber, 2 and C is the manufacturer which is Curtiss.

**MR. FIELDS:** You went out on air operations to the West Indies; is that right?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, to the West Indies. We flew — of course we all came aboard, and then we took what we called a shake-down cruise from there down to the West Indies, all the way down to Trinidad. During that

operation the ship is shaken out to get everything working. The Air Group is flying daily to organize the air group and get it flying as an ocean-going carrier group.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, let me ask you about your first carrier landing, Tom; do you remember it?

**MR. MORRIS:** I do very well.

**MR. FIELDS:** Was it on the Ticonderoga?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, it was on the Charger. The Charger was a little — you might call it a Jeep carrier, but a little short carrier, about a 500, 600-foot flight deck operated in Chesapeake Bay, and it was there strictly for training fleet pilots to get their initial carrier landing experience. So we flew out from Oceana with a group. I think we had a 9-plane group. Might have had just six with 3 dive bombers and 3 plane sections instead of 4 plane sections.

**MR. FIELDS:** Helldiver?

**MR. MORRIS:** The Helldiver. So we went out in a Helldiver. And I'll never forget that flight. The leader of our flight was a little senior -- he was senior to me; he was a lieutenant. Senior grade very probably. He might have been just a JG, I'm not sure, but I think he was senior grade. But he didn't like that idea of landing on that little short deck, and the weather was not real good that day. It was kind of overcast and it was hard to see the Charger. So we first turned back because he couldn't find the ship, couldn't find the Charger. But anyway we found the Charger, and so we did six, six landings on the Charger.

And when you come in for your first carrier landing on a ship deck, that's



only 500 or 600, feet and you've got to put that thing down for the first time on a moving vessel, it's not the easiest landing in the world. So we did six carrier landings and five takeoffs, and that was our qualification for carrier landing.

**MR. FIELDS:** I can't imagine how hard that must have been. Did you have a back-seater when you were doing carrier —

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, I had my gunner there. Yeah, my gunner was there. Once our gunners were assigned to us, the gunner flew every time I flew, so he was there.

**MR. FIELDS:** I'm not sure I would have wanted to be the backseat guy on a first carrier landing.

**MR. MORRIS:** No, I sure wouldn't have. But anyway, that's where I qualified.

**MR. FIELDS:** On the carrier you had a LSO or landing signal officer with paddles?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, yeah. We landed with manual — a manual signal officer. He stood in the signal officer's position on the portside. He looked facing you, and he gave you high, low, slow, fast, signals. And so you had to take those signals, and you had to pay absolute attention to the signal officer. You had to pay absolute — had to obey his orders absolutely. Two things you couldn't disobey, cut means you had to cut, regardless of whether you thought you were able and ready to land or not.

**MR. FIELDS:** Cut meant cut your power and drop?

**MR. MORRIS:** Drop. That means cut — you come off, pull your throttle completely off, and land. You land essentially dead stick. It's a full stall

landing is what it is.

**MR. FIELDS:** Kind of controlled crash, isn't it?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, that's what a lot of people called it, a controlled crash.

**MR. FIELDS:** Then you had an arresting hook that you would have to catch a cable with.

**MR. MORRIS:** You had a cable, you will see up there on the Helldiver you can see that one. I was just coming in in that particular picture up there. On the Ticonderoga an Essex class, we had five arresting gear cables, so your hook -- you had a tailhook which was strictly that, a hook that dangled down below at the tail of your aircraft. It was hydraulically activated so that it would stay down.

And you tried to catch the first wire if you could, because that had — it had a lot more flex in it, and the farther you went the tougher it got, the stiffer it got.

And if you missed all of them, there was a crash barrier which was raised up and stood about 5, 6 feet tall with three heavy steel cables. And so if you missed all of the arresting gear cables, you crashed into the barrier.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you ever have occasion to hit the barrier?

**MR. MORRIS:** I had one occasion to do that, and that was out in the Pacific after we got out off the West Coast. It was in a training flight as we went out — I'm getting ahead of myself — but as we went out headed to the Pacific, we still were doing daily flight training and all of that. And so I came in a little hot, and I didn't catch a cable.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you hit your head on the gun sight or the bomb sight?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, I didn't. I didn't. We had a different type of gun sight at

that time. And we had a much better harness at that point. Our shoulder harness wouldn't let you go forward that far, and the bomb sight was not the old gun sight type. It was a radial, and it sat pretty far forward on the — under the canopy so that you couldn't hit it with your head. I don't think you could.

And it also had an illumination. It had an illuminated circle in it so you didn't have to — to be frank about it, we got so we never used the damn bomb sight. We flew it by the — you flew the airplane to the target. You quit relying on a bomb sight; you just flew the airplane to the target. That's the way we did it, instead of using that bomb sight.

**MR. FIELDS:** You did it by the seat of your pants and the feel of the airplane?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, you got on your target, and you pointed the nose of that aircraft on the target, and you flew the airplane to the target until you got to the drop area.

**MR. FIELDS:** After you did your shakedown cruise, you went through the Panama Canal?

**MR. MORRIS:** After we took the shakedown, we went back to Norfolk, and the ship had to have a little repair, and of course we rounded up all the supplies and then we were assigned to Pacific, of course. We went down through the Panama Canal and up the West Coast to San Diego, took on some more supplies and some new airplanes. I don't know exactly what that was, but I know we brought aboard a number of new airplanes at San Diego before we took off for the Pacific.

**MR. FIELDS:** And you wound up at Pearl, Pearl Harbor?

**MR. MORRIS:** We got to Pearl Harbor, and the ship had some problems. We

had a bearing problem, if my memory is correct, and the ship had to go into Pearl to dry dock for a few days to get that thing straightened out. And while it was undergoing that repair, the Air Group went over to — on the windward side of the island. What was the name of that?

Anyway, it was a naval air station on the windward side of Oahu and we flew there for about two weeks while the ship was getting repaired.

And then we did some night carrier landings. After the ship got back into commission, we did some night carrier landings. We hadn't done any night carrier landings on the shakedown. We did that after we got to San Diego and headed out.

**MR. FIELDS:** I would think that would be thrilling also.

**MR. MORRIS:** That's the toughest thing I've ever done in my life, is night carrier landings, Ken, because you — when you land — we were practicing for combat, and we land without any lights on the deck. No lights on the deck except a little center guideline of lights and two little border lights so that -- and you couldn't see them from all directions. As you got into the landing position approaching, then you could pick up the little guide lights. And so you're landing on what I would call a dark flight deck.

And to gauge, well, you had to depend 100 percent, of course, on the signal officer. You couldn't fly the airplane onto there at night. You had to rely on the signal officer. But to cut it in the dark, to land it in the dark at a full stall is not too easy.

**MR. FIELDS:** Sir, I imagine that it is not.

**MR. MORRIS:** We had one, while we were doing practice landings, we had one guy who crashed aboard and his wing caught, his starboard wing caught the gun mount on the starboard side of the ship, and so that shut down night operations for that night, and some of the guys who were waiting to land had to fly back to -- oh, Kaneohe that was the name of it.

**MR. FIELDS:** Kaneohe.

**MR. MORRIS:** Kaneohe, on the windward side of Oahu. They had to fly back to the base and couldn't land aboard that night.

**MR. FIELDS:** It's hard to imagine. It's hard for me to imagine what it would be like to land on a carrier at night. Did you then sortie with other carriers?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, yeah. We went — we headed west for our first combat. And I've forgotten, about June or July, something like that. I've forgotten exactly when we —

**MR. FIELDS:** I think in November of '44 you sortied from Ulithi Atoll.

**MR. MORRIS:** That was after — I think the first sortie from Ulithi was in October. Well, I'm not sure about that, though. Anyway, before we got to that point, this is — you'll probably not find this in the history anywhere, but the Battle of the Philippines Sea had occurred, and that was the first, really the beginning of the kamikaze situation. The battle of — if my memory is right, the Battle of Phillipine Sea. And we were not in that battle, but a decision was made by command at that point to increase the number of fighters and decrease the number of dive bombers.

**MR. FIELDS:** To give you a CAP or a combat air patrol?

**MR. MORRIS:** Both combat air patrol and Jack patrol, as we called it, submarine patrol, and still have a full complement of fighters for fighter intercept and all of that.

So I was one of the pilots that was assigned from the dive bomber group to the fighter group. Went back to Pearl and checked out in the F6 Hellcat, took about — got about 15 hours experience in the Hellcat. I hadn't had any training as a fighter pilot; my training had all been dive bomber. But anyway a bunch of us did, we went back there and we qualified in the F6 on the old grand Saratoga, that was being used as a training ship at that particular point.

So we qualified as fighters, then flew out to — we did our flying from Barber's Point, which is out on the west tip off of Oahu, and so we went in a transport plane from Barber's Point to Johnston Island to Kwajalene, then up to Ulithi. And so I got to rejoin Air Group 80 at Ulithi. And that was one of the grandest sights.

And this is an aside. When we flew in, the entire — I don't know whether it's called the Fifth or the Third Fleet at that point — but the entire Air Group, both of the Air Group divisions were in anchorage at Ulithi. And as we came in there, the absolute -- Ulithi Lagoon was a perfect anchorage, and we must have had -- well, that's a good sign, one, two, three, four — four carriers all in there with all of the support ships, the cruisers, the destroyers, some destroyer escorts, the support ships like the tankers and supply ships. There must have been a hundred naval vessels in Ulithi Lagoon when we flew in there that day.

**MR. FIELDS:** What an unbelievable sight.

**MR. MORRIS:** It was the grandest sight that I ever saw in my life, to see that mass of naval power sitting there. And I was going to get to rejoin my air group.

**MR. FIELDS:** And that was the sharp end of the stick, as far as the United States Navy was concerned.

**MR. MORRIS:** Absolutely, yeah.

**MR. FIELDS:** And they called that, I think, Murderer's Row?

**MR. MORRIS:** I don't remember.

**MR. FIELDS:** At least I've read that, that lineup of carriers there.

**MR. MORRIS:** I don't remember that name, but it was a grand sight to see all of those ships, the task force just all lined up there row on row.

**MR. FIELDS:** And is this photograph, Tom, that I handed you, with the carriers lined up and the Hellcats on the carrier, how it looked?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, sure.**MR. MORRIS:** All of those are Hellcats on this ship from which this picture was taken, looking at the four lineup of carriers out there.

**MR. FIELDS:** And I think that photograph is from the Ticonderoga, so that may have been one of your Hellcats there.

**MR. MORRIS:** It could well have been.

**MR. FIELDS:** You all attacked the Philippines, then Luzon and —

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, the first mission I was on was we were beginning the invasion of the Philippines. MacArthur's group was coming in from the south, and we had another fleet of Jeep carriers and smaller forces down there who were escorting MacArthur's landing groups in, and we were





striking Luzon and all the air fields to eliminate all of the air opposition that we could and eliminate everything on the ground we could. So we spent, I don't remember what it was, three or four days on that operation flying around the clock almost, from daylight 'til dark.

**MR. FIELDS:** Can you tell me about your first combat mission?

**MR. MORRIS:** I can't distinguish one from another.

**MR. FIELDS:** You flew so many of them, they all just blended together?

**MR. MORRIS:** My mission — we guys who had been dive bombers and trained as fighters, we were called fighter bombers. Got a new name, called us fighter bombers. So almost every mission that we flew, we flew first as a bomber. We would carry a couple of 500s and go in and hit targets just like the dive bombers, then we would be free to act as a fighter plane. And so that was my first mission.

You know, it was on Mindanao. It wasn't on Luzon. On my first mission we struck Mindanao, which is south of Luzon.

**MR. FIELDS:** Right.

**MR. MORRIS:** And as I recall, all we were focusing on was the Tachikawa Airfield, and put it out of commission.

**MR. FIELDS:** Was it at Del Monte, the Del Monte Pineapple Plantation, where there was a U.S. base when the Japs took the Philippines, or do you recall?

**MR. MORRIS:** I don't remember that, Ken. I just don't remember. We were assigned targets, and we hit our targets, and I don't know the history of them, except that.

**MR. FIELDS:** Do you recall your first sight of a Japanese aircraft, war plane,

the first time you saw —

**MR. MORRIS:** The first Japanese aircraft?

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes Sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, I think I do. I think on that first mission, there was some Japanese fighter opposition. And I saw a group down below. We had some broken clouds that day, the day we first flew in. And I saw a group of Japanese planes down below us through the broken clouds. That's all. I never saw anymore that day. I didn't see another Japanese plane that day.

**MR. FIELDS:** Were they fighters or bombers or could you tell?

**MR. MORRIS:** They were not fighters. They were not Zekes, not Zeros.

They were more like -- well, they had two or three different bombers, the Val.

**MR. FIELDS:** Vals, Kates and Bettys?

**MR. MORRIS:** Bettys, yeah. They were not fighters. I'm sure they were not fighters. But that's all I saw that day.

**MR. FIELDS:** Do you recall the first time you fired your six .50 caliber machine guns in the Hellcat at the enemy?

**MR. MORRIS:** We fired them on every mission. We found a target of some kind on every mission, and when we finished bombing, if we didn't have any — if there wasn't any air opposition we strafed every kind of a target that we could find. We strafed everything that there was, until you ran out of ammunition, for all practical purposes.

**MR. FIELDS:** And how many seconds or minutes of ammunition, if you just put your thumb down and fired it would you have, Tom?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, you would burn up your gun if you did that. You did it in bursts; you fired it in bursts. But we had 600 -- I believe it was 600 rounds, 50 caliber, for each machine gun. We had 6 machine guns; 3 in each wing. So I don't know how long it would take if you just squeezed the trigger and let it go, but we never did that, because you would just burn up the barrel of the machine gun if did you that.

**MR. FIELDS:** My impression has been you didn't have more than maybe a minute or two of total firing time; it wasn't very — it wasn't very much.

**MR. MORRIS:** I don't know the rounds per second that those guns would fire.

**MR. FIELDS:** What was it like to be in the cockpit of a Hellcat and cut those six fifties loose?

**MR. MORRIS:** Wonderful airplane. I loved the Hellcat. When I got in the Hellcat, I found my love of all airplanes. It was a pilot's airplane. You could get away with murder. It would fly slow; it would maneuver good. It had good armament. It had pretty good speed, not as much as you would like, but it was heavily armored. It had — the only bad tendency that the F6 had that I didn't like, it's a short coupled airplane. Its fuselage is pretty short, and it tends to walk or yaw in a high-speed dive, as you get it up close to — because you could dive a Hellcat up close to 400 knots in a 70-degree dive. If you hold it in the dive, you could get it up close to 400 knots, 380, 390, something like that, but it tended — as you got high speed like that, it tended to walk, or I call it walk or yaw just a little bit. Whereas, when I got it later in the Corsair, it was steady as a rock. But the F-6, that was the best airplane I ever flew from a pilot's standpoint.

**MR. FIELDS:** They were designed to fight the Zero, and they had a great rate of climb, didn't they?

**MR. MORRIS:** A good rate of climb, a good dive rate. The Hellcat could outdive the Zero, outclimb the Zero; could not maneuver with the Zero, because the Zero was very light and had very little armor plate, and it could — you didn't — you just couldn't afford to get into a true dogfight with a Zero, because he could circle inside of you.

**MR. FIELDS:** The history of the Ticonderoga that I've looked at indicated that dive bombers and fighters sank a Japanese heavy cruiser the Nachi; do you remember anything about that?

**MR. MORRIS:** I do. I remember it, and I remember which one of the — I believe -- let me think just a minute.

**MR. MORRIS:** Peterson — no, that's not right. That's not right. I can't remember.

One of the -- one of our dive bombers put a thousand pounder right down the smoke stack almost, and it went everywhere. Oh, Perkins, Perkins was his name, Lieutenant Perkins. He was an Annapolis graduate, and he and I think Jim Newquest, who was an All American from Washington University, played UT before — there before the war. But anyway, both of them got direct hits on that heavy cruiser and sunk it.

**MR. FIELDS:** From the Ticonderoga history, apparently there was a kamikaze attack. The Japanese began sending kamikazes out, but they didn't hit the Ticonderoga on that particular day.

**MR. MORRIS:** That was maybe the first of the kamikaze attacks directly into the carrier fleet, and one of the ships was hit.

**MR. FIELDS:** The Lexington?

**MR. MORRIS:** Was it the Lex? Yeah, I'm sure it was. She was a sister ship.

**MR. FIELDS:** The Ticonderoga history indicates that on November 11th her aircraft attacked a Japanese reinforcement convoy at Ormoc Bay and sank all of those.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you participate in that?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes.

**MR. FIELDS:** Were you flying a Hellcat then?

**MR. MORRIS:** I was flying Hellcats, yeah.

**MR. FIELDS:** And that would be a good straffing vehicle, I guess, for transports?

**MR. MORRIS:** Primarily. But we caught — I was thinking it was a little bit later than that. The sequences that I remember particularly, after we had Luzon pretty well neutralized, well, totally neutralized from an aircraft standpoint, airfields knocked out. They weren't -- no fighters were coming up anymore — then we made a run up north. Bull Halsey was our admiral at that time. We thought we had some intelligence that remnants of the remaining Japanese fleet were up north toward — going like you're going toward Okinawa. So we made a high speed run up there and didn't find anything.

**MR. FIELDS:** Bull Halsey caught hell for that because he left the invasion fleet unprotected.

**MR. MORRIS:** He left the invasion fleet down there by itself, and there's a

famous book written called The Last of the Tin Can Sailors.

**MR. FIELDS:** I've read it, yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** Have you read that?

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** That's the most fantastic book. Halsey caught hell on that, because we should have been down there helping those guys, and they were -- they just had some little Jeep carriers.

**MR. FIELDS:** And Destroyers.

**MR. MORRIS:** F4F's, little Wildcat fighters and some torpedo planes. They didn't have any dive bombers at all, and those all — most of those got knocked out pretty quick. So it was the destroyer fleet, which was almost totally by itself against the principal Japanese fleet which Halsey went north looking for, and they were coming in down south. What's the strait down there below in the Philippines?

**MR. FIELDS:** Straits of Formosa?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, that's way down south of Formosa. I'll get to that in just a minute. But anyway, you read that story. And they put up probably the greatest battle of destroyers against a full force Japanese force including battleships and heavy cruisers and the whole works. And those guys were just, all of them practically, blown out of the water. We lost practically every ship we had in there. There were a lot of survivors and some of the dangdest battle heroics you will ever hear in your life were those guys that fought down there. And we were up running up north —

**MR. FIELDS:** With Halsey.

**MR. MORRIS:** — trying to find what we thought was the Japanese fleet.

Well, it wasn't up there.

**MR. FIELDS:** That's probably the most heroic destroyer battle I've ever read of, and that's the book *The Tin Can Sailors*?

**MR. MORRIS:** It's the most fantastic story that you've ever seen.

**MR. FIELDS:** What happened, Tom, after Halsey turned around and came back to the --

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, we came back down, and then — we thought we had some intelligence on some more Japanese fleet in the South China Sea. So we went into the South China Sea, and we went all the way down to Hong Kong, Hanoi, Saigon, and we caught a lot of what I call merchant type ships, cargo ships and tankers escorted by nothing but little destroyer escorts. And we must have sunk — oh, we must have sunk 20 ships on that sortie into the South China Sea.

**MR. FIELDS:** There is a reference to the Ticonderoga pilots finishing off the heavy cruiser Kumano.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah. That was in that operation.

**MR. FIELDS:** And then another cruiser, the Yasoshima.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yasoshima, yeah, we sunk the Yasoshima. And let's see, who was that? That was -- I remember the pilot who got the direct hit on that.

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, I can't call his name, but I remember who he was, one of our pilots, one of our dive bombers.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you participate in the attacks on Kumano and Yasoshima?

**MR. MORRIS:** The Yasoshima, not on the Kumano. I wasn't in that particular — on that flight.

**MR. FIELDS:** What was the action on the Ticonderoga next after those cruisers were sunk?

**MR. MORRIS:** Now, I'm not just sure how this came about. Somewhere along in there -- we were flying every day during those — well, let me try to get this shaped up.

We did a scouting mission way up north. We got some more intelligence of the possibility of some Japanese fleet up to the north up toward Okinawa, and we did some long-range searches to try to find them.

And this is one of my good wartime stories. A fighter flew wingman for a dive bomber; the dive bomber took the lead to navigate and had one fighter fly his wing as escort just in case we ran into anything.

So I was flying wing for Don Monsan who was a dive bomber pilot. We had the sector straight as far north as you could possibly go. And those were long sectors. We flew out about 450 nautical miles, maybe 500 nautical miles, and cut a leg across and then came back to the fleet.

And the story I gave you awhile ago, he and I were in the air 6.9 hours, if you can imagine, in single-wing carrier aircraft. Of course, we had auxiliary gas tanks on takeoff, which we dropped after those were all gone.

But coming back, it was getting close to dark; it was late in the day. And we had gone through a frontal movement, and the wind direction had changed on us, so direct navigation was not too accurate, and when we got back to where the Fleet was supposed to be — you know, you had the Fleet's course and direction for the day, what it would be, so you could plot it on your plotting board and navigate with dead reckoning. Well, when we got back to the rendezvous point, there wasn't any Fleet there,



and we couldn't pick up a hayrake signal. That was a little directional finder.

**MR. FIELDS:** You had an RDF, radio directional finder?

**MR. MORRIS:** We did, — 360 degrees with sectors, 15-degree sectors, and we didn't have any hayrake. It was about 30 minutes before dark. So we just started a square search. That was the typical way: You went out a leg, and the theory was that wherever you had missed them, you would pick them up on one of the legs. So we picked up the hayrake going on I think the second leg of our search and so we could direction again then. So we got in, got back into the Fleet.

We landed — we were -- the needles were bouncing on empty. And he landed first and taxied forward, and I behind him, and my engine conked out in the arresting gear.

**MR. FIELDS:** Golly.

**MR. MORRIS:** I made it aboard, caught the hook, came to a stop; my engine stopped.

**MR. FIELDS:** Ran out of juice.

**MR. MORRIS:** Out of gas.

**MR. FIELDS:** Wow.

**MR. MORRIS:** Out of gas. So that's one of my stories. One of the times when your heart got in your mouth a little bit.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir, and that was a night landing?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, no. We got aboard just before dark. It was dusk, but we had enough light to land okay.

So I'm not sure exactly where that fits into the calendar. I was thinking we

did that before we went down into the South China Sea, but — we went into the South China Sea twice.

It was early January, I know that. And when we came back out of the South China Sea, we made a big run on Formosa. The south tip of Formosa was a heavily fortified Japanese fleet anchorage. The port was called Takao, we called it then. I've forgotten what it's called now. Well, anyway, it was right on the south tip.

And we made a run on that base and had another huge success at sinking stuff. And I was flying second section for Scoop Vorce, who was our fighter commander. As we went into bomb Formosa, he got some shrapnel or anti-aircraft which blew off about the starboard 6 feet of his — 6 feet of his starboard wing, and so he could not slow his plane down enough to land aboard a carrier. He had to do a water landing or bail out. So his flight — his wingman was named Carter, and I was flying second division behind him that day. And we flew — flew in to — flew Scoop to the water. And we were getting into -- either coming out of or getting into a typhoon condition at that point, running very heavy seas; there were 15, 20-foot seas at that point.

So he had to make a choice of either coming in and bailing out and being picked up or landing his aircraft in the water at a high speed. At about 200 knots. He had to keep it about 200 knots in order to keep it airborne. He elected to land it of all things, and he came in and hit the top one of those (demonstrating with hand) kind of pancaked off the top of that roll. The plane flipped sideways and slid down in a trough. And as they knew he was going to have to crashland, they had a destroyer right

there right where he landed. And that son-of-a-gun climbed out of that cockpit, got out on the wing, and the destroyer came in and threw a line to him, and he grabbed that line and was aboard the destroyer in just a few minutes.

**MR. FIELDS:** Amazing.

**MR. MORRIS:** Survived that crash. Let me talk about old Scoop a little bit. Scoop had been through the early days of the war, the Hornet, the Wasp or one of the earlier carriers that got sunk, been through the early days when he was a fighter pilot and they were outnumbered, of course. Every time they went up, they were outnumbered. So he was a skittish, what I call a skittish, flier. He just — he's looking for Japs constantly. He just flew his airplane (demonstrating) so we just learned to back off of old Scoop. You didn't go in and try to fly regular wing on Scoop; you just backed off about 100 foot and let him maneuver his way. You just stayed with him. But he was a wonderful skipper and a wonderful flier. And he survived that water landing and got aboard the destroyer.

**MR. FIELDS:** That's amazing. You mentioned a typhoon, and there's a reference in the Ticonderoga history to a horrible typhoon that sank 3 destroyers and killed 800 sailors.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, let me tell you about that. That's the second story I like to tell. We were going into this typhoon, and it was getting really bad. The destroyers were trying to refuel. All the ships were trying to refuel, because you needed plenty of ballast and so on to go into — head into a typhoon with those heavy seas that we were going to encounter. But while we were in that process — and it's very overcast, visibility was

very poor, and we got some bogies on the screen, and I was — I was ready division. I was division lead that particular day, and we were ordered to man aircraft.

**MR. FIELDS:** Hellcats?

**MR. MORRIS:** Hellcats. The ready division was ordered to man aircraft. Well not the ready division because we only had two planes in the catapults, latched down in the catapults. So it was just two sections, the lead section was ordered to man aircraft. So we manned aircraft, knowing that if we launched, we — no way we could ever get back. We would have to take off and try to — and I think we were in the South China Sea at that point, at that time. I'm not sure where that was, but we knew that our only chance to survive would be to try to fly to the Chinese mainland if that occurred.

**MR. FIELDS:** That's because of the typhoon?

**MR. MORRIS:** Lost in the typhoon.

**MR. FIELDS:** Right.

**MR. MORRIS:** There wouldn't be any way to get back aboard the ship; there was no way.

So we sat in the catapults, my wingman and I. He was in the port catapult and I was in the starboard catapult, sitting there with our engines turning. The ship would plunge off the top of a roll and here would come the spray flying up over the deck. And then you would go out, come out of that and be looking just up into the clouds. That's all you could see. We sat there, Ken, nearly 30 minutes in that position ready to take off, and, finally, they said, cut engines. And that was -- that was probably the most frightening experience I had in all the war years was that situation.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tom, I remember that story before.

**MR. MORRIS:** Had I told you that?

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir, and I was looking to get more detail about it.

**MR. MORRIS:** It's not in any of the history that I've ever read, but it's a fact.

My wingman's name was Joseph Arthur Christian Snyder. He was born in Iceland. Grew up in North Dakota. And he's the best wingman that I ever had in my life. He could absolutely latch onto your wing, and you couldn't lose him. You could do anything and he was right there.

**MR. FIELDS:** Basically, you sat there strapped in for that period of time knowing that you were either going to die or you might wind up on the coast of China, God knows where.

**MR. MORRIS:** Either I wasn't going to get back or maybe I could make it to the coast of China, but that's the way it was.

**MR. FIELDS:** Those typhoon conditions sank 3 destroyers and killed 800 sailors?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, we had 3 — we lost 3 destroyers. That night we lost 3 destroyers.

**MR. FIELDS:** Just sank them.

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, they didn't get to fuel. They didn't get to refuel. The fueling operation is an interesting thing. The tanker comes alongside the destroyer or whatever the ship is, comes alongside the tanker, and the tanker fires a line across to the other ship, and then they drag the refueling hoses, lines, across and connect them to the fuel tanks on the ship. And three destroyers were unable to refuel, so they didn't have any ballast, and they didn't have any fuel to keep their power up, and they lost power during

the night, and they were just wallowing in this typhoon and they rolled over, and we lost three destroyers that night.

**MR. FIELDS:** And 800 men?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, I'm sure we lost all crew. There wasn't anybody — that I recall, there wasn't anybody recovered from those three destroyers. I don't think there was.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tom, I've always remembered that story, you are sitting there facing death, the unknown, under the best of circumstances.

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, you hope for the best.

**MR. FIELDS:** That's amazing.

**MR. MORRIS:** You hoped you would make it to the Chinese mainland and maybe be able to crash land or something, bail out.

**MR. FIELDS:** Well, it moves me to say that what you men did during World War II, that's just — that was a routine thing for you.

**MR. MORRIS:** You did what you were assigned to do, Ken.

**MR. FIELDS:** It was a stunning act of courage, as far as I'm concerned.

**MR. MORRIS:** That's all there was to it; you did what you were assigned to do.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir. The task force was so damaged by that typhoon that you spent a lot of time back in anchorage doing repairs to the ships?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, yeah.

**MR. FIELDS:** And then you went back through the Luzon Strait down to the South China Sea?

**MR. MORRIS:** Went back down to the China Sea. I think — well, I don't remember the details.

But anyway, as we were coming back out of the South China Sea that time, we made another run on Formosa, and somehow a group of kamikazes followed us out. I don't know where they were; we didn't have any air opposition at all. But some kamikaze pilots followed us. They must have been right down on the water, and they weren't picked up by our radar, and so we got in — came through the Strait, Formosa Strait, and everything was fine, no problems, and we went to what we called a Condition Baker. Called a Condition Baker on the Ticonderoga, and that's where you're semi-battle ready, but you're not. You open up a few hatches and things like that. The morning sortie, we had — I had been on the morning run over Formosa and had come back aboard and landed. And we had the fighters down on the hangar deck, all had been refueled and re-ammo'd, ready to take off for the afternoon.

**MR. FIELDS:** Now, the hangar deck is just below the flight deck?

**MR. MORRIS:** Hangar deck is below the flight deck. It's — you see there's what we call our gallery that's between the flight deck and the hangar deck. You go down some ladders or stairs. Ladders really is what they are. But this kamikaze — well, let me complete my story. I was getting ready for the afternoon run, and we had — the flight deck was full of aircraft loaded with ammo and fuel and so on, so we had both the hangar deck and the flight deck, except for a few planes which were out, ready for the second launch. And this one kamikaze came in, and I say that — stories are different as to how he came in. Some people say he came out of the clouds. I say he came in over the fantail and pulled up. He came in right on the water, pulled up over the fantail, and dived through the forward

elevator, which was open, and exploded on the hangar deck. Now, I say that — I shouldn't say that really, because I wasn't up on top. I had been to the wardroom, had a bite of lunch, and was climbing the ladder back from the wardroom up to the fighter ready room when that happened. Well, I was probably 400 feet out from where he drove through the forward elevator, and he exploded there. Of course, the fighters were — ammo began to go off and there was gasoline — they were all fueled up, and gasoline was running out of the tanks and the hangar deck was being flooded with gasoline. It was all on fire. And I got up the ladder and got up to the ready room and our — the fighter's ready room was not in a serious problem at that point, but the dive bomber's ready room was all full of smoke and there were guys trying to get out of there. And we got up on the flight deck. I went out on the catwalk and up on the flight deck. And we just about had the first fires under control in about an hour, hour and a half, something like that. We just about had those fires under control. The skipper had laid the ship over into a turn with about a, as I recall it, a 10 to 15-degree list, something like that, and that was to keep the fire from going down to the lower decks and to flood that -- try to flood gasoline off the hangar deck.

**MR. FIELDS:** The history says a 10-degree starboard list.

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, that sounds about right. I said 10 to 15. It seemed to me like it was more than that because the deck was canted. But anyway, we got those -- nearly had those fires out when the second kamikaze came in. Now, he did come in out of the low clouds. It was broken clouds that



day.

And he came in out of low clouds on the starboard side, and as he came in, Ken, we had — there was one fighter or two fighters in the air trying to get on his tail. And every anti-aircraft gun that we had on the Ticonderoga was on him, and he was absolutely on fire, but he flew the last — I would say the last thousand feet into the ship on fire, but he managed to control that airplane and flew it into the superstructure of the Ticonderoga. And that's when Dixie Kiefer was hurt and the air officer was hurt. And, let's see, the engineering officer survived. A couple of the officers survived and most everybody else on the island was killed.

**MR. FIELDS:** Where were you when the second kamikaze came in?

**MR. MORRIS:** I was on the flight deck behind a group of Marines who were operating a 20-millimeter anti-aircraft gun. I was there in that gun well with that group of Marines who -- I didn't have a gun, but I was there in that well with them when they were shooting at that incoming kamikaze.

**MR. FIELDS:** You saw the second kamikaze?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, I saw it all the way in. He came right in. And we had still not seen any of the torpedo bombers. They had gotten out and had gone forward on the portside, but we didn't know it, because there was fire between us and them. So there were three — three of the pilots were trying to chop a hole over the torpedo squadron's room, flight room — ready room. I say flight room, ready room. Trying to chop holes in that flight deck which is 14 inch timber, oil-treated timber, hard as a damn rock, but they were there with axes trying to chop through that flight deck

to get down to those torpedo guys who they thought might still be down there when that second kamikaze hit, and two of those pilots were killed when he exploded and the shrapnel hit them while they were trying to chop these other guys out.

**MR. FIELDS:** How far away from the second kamikaze strike were you, Tom?

**MR. MORRIS:** Probably 300 feet, 200 to 300 feet.

**MR. FIELDS:** Could you tell what type of aircraft it was?

**MR. MORRIS:** Frankly, I couldn't identify it. I don't know what it was.

**MR. FIELDS:** What happened after that second kamikaze?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, after the second one, of course, we were all on fire again.

This time we had some hatches closed below so the fire wasn't going to go down below deck anymore, but we were on fire again up on the flight deck. We had been shoving aircraft over the — off the flight deck, just shoving them into the water. Because they were all loaded with fuel and bombs and so on. So we had to fight that fire again, and it took another, probably another hour to get that fire under control.

But we finally got it all out and then began to count our casualties. We — as I remember, we had about 200 — over 200 seriously injured people, most of whom were burned, and we lost something like 180, 190, something like that who were killed in those fires. I remember our intelligence officer was found floating in the water forward of the hangar deck. So it was a pretty sad situation.

And the guys that were injured, a lot of them were still alive, were badly burned. And you know how terrible a burn is when you are burned over

80 percent of your body and you begin to — your body begins to swell and they are all in shock and they're not dead, but... Still alive but in deep shock.

And we were trying to — we all were trying to administer aid to the guys, we had morphine to give them shots to relieve the pain, but most all of them died, most of them that were badly burned. And so the next day then after we headed back to Ulithi Lagoon — the ship could operate at a low speed, about half speed I think. I think we probably could get it up to like 20 knots, something like that. So we headed back to Ulithi. And the next day we, of course, buried at sea the people who had died. We got on back to Ulithi, and the Ticonderoga survived and she was then — we transferred the air group off the Ticonderoga, went to a little landing field there called — oh, what did they call that -- Mogmog. A little island called Mogmog. Mogmog Island in Ulithi Lagoon that had about a 5,000-foot runway, and so the Air Group went ashore. We didn't have a ship to go aboard at that point, but the Ti was coming back to the United States, and it did. It left — it was just refitted, and so it took people who needed to go back, and those that were still able to be treated were transferred to the hospital ship in Ulithi. And the Ti started back to Pearl and ultimately for Bremerton and was repaired, and after about six months came back. Of course, we never saw her again.

We went — the Air Group went on to Guam, and we were on Guam about two days -- two weeks, about two weeks before we could get a ship home, and we got aboard a Navy Jeep — a British Navy Jeep carrier that had been transporting aircraft to the Pacific, named His Majesty's Ship

Ranee.

**MR. FIELDS:** Ranee?

**MR. MORRIS:** Ranee, R-A-N-E-E, I believe was the name of it. HMS Ranee anyway. So the whole Air Group went aboard the Ranee to come back to Pearl. And we — that was kind of an interesting little trip. We were out of combat and the British opened up their bar at tea time every afternoon. That was just for the officers. Just for the officers. But all of us, all of we officers were invited to participate in their what we called the hospitality hour. So we had about an hour in the afternoon; they opened up their bar and so we were able to get a drink. So we rode the Ranee back to Pearl, and from there we got on the Matsonia which were one of the luxury passenger ships in those days that had been converted into a troop carrier. So we got on that Matsonia from Pearl back to the San Francisco to Alameda. That was the end of my combat career. We all got a 30-day leave and then we reorganized Air Group 80, and this time I was a more senior officer, and we got the Corsairs F4U's for the fighter bomber squadron, and we got the new Bearcat F8F's for the fighter squadron. Still had the old TBM's or TBF's for the torpedo squadron. But I was flying Corsairs, and the fighter group, was flying Bearcats F8's.

**MR. FIELDS:** How was the Corsair to fly?

**MR. MORRIS:** The Corsair was a wonderful airplane. And I was engineering officer at that time and did all the test-flying of the Corsair. It was faster, considerably faster than the F6. You could almost get 400 knots out of it straight level, pretty close to 400. Some guys say they could see 400 but I

think they had their nose down just a little bit when they did. But it was a good aircraft, a tremendous weight-carrying capacity. It did not have very good maneuverability, of course, because it was a bigger, much bigger airplane. It weighed about 14,000 pounds, I think, 7 tons.

**MR. FIELDS:** Wow.

**MR. MORRIS:** And then when you got fully loaded with fuel and ammo, it was heavier than that. But boy it would dive; it would dive straight away. You didn't have any air brakes on the Corsair. When you put it into a 70 degree dive, you are over past 400 real quick.

**MR. FIELDS:** Was it a difficult aircraft to land on a carrier?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, it's different. It was more difficult to land than the F6. As you come around — people that don't know that in the Navy, you fly as you do your — in those days, not anymore but in those days, we came around and made our approach to the ship in a turn flying at just about 10 nautical miles or knots above stall speed with the nose held high and flying in there. And it had a great big long nose, the Corsair did, out in front of it, about 14, 15 feet out in front of the cockpit. And this inverted gull wing, it had a tendency to — if you got a little too steep as you're coming in too slow, it had a tendency to blank out, and the left wing kick out from under you. It was more touchy in the landing than the F-6. It came out a little bit faster. You could put the F-6 down at 60 knots. The Corsair at least 70. You had to keep it at least above 70, more like 70 to 80, so it wasn't as easy to fly, but it was a great, great airplane.

**MR. FIELDS:** The purpose of the gull wing was to get the gear down low enough to let you clear the prop, wasn't it?

**MR. MORRIS:** To accommodate the gear and the props. If you'll remember as you've seen from the old pictures, the original Corsair, all those inverted -- an inverted gull, even if it was a smaller inverted gull, it had a great big 13-foot radius prop on it, a 3-bladed prop with a 13-foot radius, so it just looked like it was sitting looking in the air. Well, the new models of the Corsair, the F4U4 — I've forgotten, the F4U4G I believe it was; anyway the version we had, they had reduced the prop down to a four blade, changed it to a 4-bladed prop, much, much shorter. And that gave you a lot better flying attitude and raised the tail up just a little bit and it gave you a lot better visibility for takeoff and landing purposes.

It was a lot more aircraft than the old original Corsair was. My good friend — oh, what's his name? I say my good friend but I can't call his name. Anyway, he was a Marine pilot and flew the original Corsair. It was a big ole 13-foot prop, down in the Solomon Islands down in the deep south. I never did get down that far south.

**MR. FIELDS:** Is that down around Guadalcanal?

**MR. MORRIS:** Uh-huh, yep. But the Corsair was a great airplane, I loved it, but not like I did the F6.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tom, I thought I would show you a few of these pictures here.

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, sure, sure.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tom, what did you do after you all got checked out on Corsairs?

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, we went to the desert out to Holtville. There's a naval air station at Holtville, right out in the middle of the Emperial Desert. It's right close to El Centro, California. There's a Marine base at El Centro. And we went out into the desert to do 24-hour a day flying, getting ready

for the Japanese invasion. We knew we were going to do a lot of low level flying, so we were doing low level flying out there in the desert. And we stayed out there for the full month of July, I believe it was July of 1945, and then we went back to the West Coast to San Diego, the dive bombers, fighter bombers were at Ream Field and the fighters were over at North Island.

We were getting ready to go aboard, as I recall, the new Ranger, which was a new class of carriers. It was a little bigger than the Essex. It wasn't — I think there were only one or two of those built. But anyway, we were getting ready to go aboard our new carrier, had the Air Group all reorganized, and the war was over. Dropped the bomb and the war was over. Then I got out. The Skipper tried to get me to stay in, but I wanted to get back to law school. So I had enough points, on the first muster out; I had enough points to get out. Of course the war was over anyway, it didn't — I didn't want a career as a Navy flier; I wanted to get back to law school. So I left San Diego in late September of 1945 and got back to law school in time -- they were on a three-semester program at the university at that time, so I got back in time to get into law school in November of 1945 and finished my senior year, and then went on the faculty at the law school for two years, and taught at the university for two years after that. So my Navy career was over in September. Actually, my discharge date was October 13th, 1945.

**MR. FIELDS:** How was it coming from such a combat environment back into law school? Did you have any trouble making that transition?

**MR. MORRIS:** Ken, it was the easiest transition I ever made in my life. I was

ready. The war was over. I didn't have my mind on defeating Japanese anymore. I was ready to get back to law school and get on with my life. So that was the easiest year of all of my law school. I just made top grades in everything. I won every prize there was to win. I got the first prize for the best law review writing. I was associate editor of the law review. I was quiz master for Judge George Stumberg, the most intelligent man I ever knew in my life. His quiz master, then I went on faculty for two years. But that senior year was just like — just easy. It just came -- you know, I had done something that nobody — everybody thought I was crazy. But I took along a couple of law books, carried in my duffel bag all of my flight years. I took McCormick on Evidence and I've forgotten what the other one was. But I would sit in the ready room and read a law book while the other guys were playing cards.

**MR. FIELDS:** Oh, that's fascinating. That's wonderful.

**MR. MORRIS:** So I kept contact with the law and enjoyed it. I didn't care anything about playing poker and all of that junk. It just seemed like a waste of time to me. I like to be doing something.

So when I got back to law school, it was just like falling off a log, it was so easy. Dean McCormick was the dean of the law school then, and he was a prince, just an absolute prince.

George Stumberg was the most intelligent man that I think I've ever known in my whole life. He was — when I got on the faculty, there I was a fellow faculty member with George Stumberg and Dean McCormick and people like Judge Stayton, Robert Stayton, and, oh,

Davis who was a great administrative author. A.W. Walker, A.W. Walker



who was the father of oil and gas law in the State of Texas. I got very close to him. We both taught property law. I would, when he needed to go out of town for some reason, and he was consulting with the oil and gas companies in those days, he would be gone sometimes a week at a time. I would take his class and teach his class for him while he was gone.

**MR. FIELDS:** And you taught my partner Bill Waters?

**MR. MORRIS:** I taught Bill Waters who was in one of the first-classes I taught. I taught Judge Mary Lou Robinson. She was in one of my classes, and A.J., her husband, was in one of my classes. So I've had a vast experience.

**MR. FIELDS:** You have had a vast experience. Tom, when the war was over — I've said to people when today people will occasionally complain that we shouldn't have dropped the atomic weapons on Japan. And I've always thought that the only people who are entitled to an opinion about that are the guys that were about to go fight them. Do you have an opinion about that?

**MR. MORRIS:** Ken, I absolutely think it was — the decision was exactly correct, and if we hadn't done that, we would have lost — if we would have had to go ahead and invade Japan to end that war, we would have lost another half million of our soldiers, people. Because I don't care if we had all of their aircraft eliminated, all of that, we would have had to fight every foot of the way. Just like we did at Iwo Jima, we flew support over Iwo Jima for three days, and that was the most beautifully planned operation that you ever saw in your life. And we put -  
- laid down napalm bombs across that island, bracketed it with napalm, burned it up. But when those soldiers, Marines and Army guys —

Marines, it was all Marines I guess, hit the beach and once we stopped the protective runs, here came those Japanese popping out of those caves and just slaughtering the guys on the beach. Well, we would have had the same thing in Japan if we had to invade Japan. If we hadn't dropped the bomb, that's exactly what would have happened and nobody knows how many thousands, thousands of troops we would have lost on those beaches as we got in there. So I think the decision was an absolutely correct decision. That's one great thing I attribute to Harry Truman. That was one of the greatest decisions he ever made, was to drop those bombs.

**MR. FIELDS:** Was the Ticonderoga off Iwo Jima? Did you fly at Iwo Jima?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, yes, we supported Iwo Jima for three days, that whole operation to start with.

**MR. FIELDS:** What aircraft were you flying?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, I didn't finish my story after. We went aboard the Hancock. I skipped a whole chapter —

**MR. FIELDS:** Well, let's revisit that.

**MR. MORRIS:** — of my career. After we got off the Ticonderoga we went to Guam, and then we went aboard the Hancock. And then is when we made all the run up north up through the Ryukyu chain and eliminated everything that there was in the way. Then we did the Iwo Jima operations, supported Iwo Jima, made the runs up to the south end of Okinawa just before -- we didn't reach the Okinawa invasion, but we spent the last month and a half north of the Philippines, going up the coast, eliminating everything there was until there wasn't any — wasn't any Japanese shipping left.

**MR. FIELDS:** And you were in Corsairs then?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, I was flying the F6's at that point. I didn't get the Corsairs until we got back to the states.

**MR. FIELDS:** Okay.

**MR. MORRIS:** So I left out a whole chapter.

**MR. FIELDS:** Well, you dropped napalm on Sugar Loaf then, I guess, on Iwo Jima?

**MR. MORRIS:** Not on Sugar Loaf itself. But what we did, we had the whole island gridded. We had grids with assigned numbers for those grids on the entire island, on at least the invasion side of it. And we flew napalm bombs — and all of us flew — dropped napalms, the dive bombers and the fighters everyone. We could carry a 1000-pound napalm tank under an F6.

So we- bracketed, and we were all assigned a bracket and we delivered a napalm bomb, tried to hit that exact bracket if we could. So literally whatever was on the surface of the last, we burned it up. There wasn't anything left there.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did it look just like a moonscape?

**MR. MORRIS:** It was just nothing but lava. It's a lava island in the first place. There's not much anyway.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you see any Japanese on the island at all?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, yeah, you would see some scurrying around on the ground. We would go in low enough, because we would drop that napalm. Instead of going in a dive bomb run, we would take a flat run. Take it in and skip it on the ground. And, yeah, we saw some on the ground, but not

many. They were mostly in the caves. But once the fire was out, here they came out, and the boys on the beach were slaughtered. So, yeah that was — I forgot to mention that run.

**MR. FIELDS:** I'm glad we worked that back in, Tom. Tom, you told a story one time at the dedication of a memorial honoring World War II Veterans over at the Court of Appeals that involved fear. And I wonder if you recall that and would want to tell me that story. There was a young lawyer you were trying to make into a trial lawyer.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, well, that's a good story. That came much later. We had a — I won't call his name; you would know him well.

He was a bank officer over at what was then the American National Bank here in Amarillo. He was a trust officer, but he got the idea that he would like to be a trial lawyer. So he came over to our firm, the old Gibson, Ochsner & Adkins Firm. And we interviewed him; I interviewed him, and he said that's what he would like to do.

So we hired him, and he worked under me, and I trained him for a couple of years, and at some point we turned him loose trying some lawsuits.

And he came in one morning and he said, Tom — or Mr. Morris he probably called me at that time. He says, I've made a bad decision. He said, I am literally scared to death to try a lawsuit. He said, I go over there to announce ready, and I'm just shaking. I don't know why, but I just can't get used to the courtroom. It scares me to death.

I said, what in the hell is it you're afraid of? I said, you ought to be flying in a 70 degree dive with artillery busting all around you trying to keep your gun sight on a target and you would know what fear is.

**MR. FIELDS:** Well, I didn't forget that story, so I wanted to make sure we revisited it today.

**MR. MORRIS:** So he said, well, I appreciate that, but I just can't do it. I'm shaking in my boots every time I announce ready for trial. So I said, fine, if that's the way you feel you do what you want to do. So he went back to the bank as a trust officer, and then later became a judge. So he got up on the side which was creating the fear.

**MR. FIELDS:** There you go.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, that was an interesting story.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tom, the stories — your backseater, your enlisted man, did you ever have any contact with him after the war?

**MR. MORRIS:** He was killed over the Philippines.

**MR. FIELDS:** Really?

**MR. MORRIS:** When I was transferred to fighters, he became the gunner for a pilot named Bagley. Bagley, yeah that was his name. And they were shot down over Luzon on a run on Clark Field and the plane, they didn't — they crashed. I mean, he and — the pilot and my gunner were both killed. So that's...

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you ever have occasion to fire your guns at any other aircraft in the air during any of your activities?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, and I didn't get any hit. On one of the -- this was over Luzon. I'm just -- well, I'm sure that's where it was. It was over Luzon, and we caught some torpedo-type planes. I want to say Val was the name of the plane.

But we went in for a run, and my wingman shot down the plane. I was --

we were both aiming on the same plane. He shot him down before I did, and that's the only time that I ever actually fired a burst of guns at a Japanese plane in the air.

**MR. FIELDS:** You were in a Hellcat then?

**MR. MORRIS:** I was in a Hellcat.

**MR. FIELDS:** And if it was a torpedo bomber, it would have been a Kate, I think?

**MR. MORRIS:** It could have been a Kate. That probably was the name of it. I know it was — anyway, it was a low-speed aircraft and it — no opposition to us at all.

**MR. FIELDS:** Right.

**MR. MORRIS:** I never met a Zeke never, or a Zero. Never faced a Zero.

Never saw one and had a chance at him.

**MR. FIELDS:** That's amazing. Tom, I'm going to just hand you some of the things we have here, and see if you can identify them for the interview.

Here is an account by a squadron mate of yours named Ralph Palmer.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, Ralph Palmer was a dive bomber, pilot, and he was shot down over Formosa. He made a belly landing, and he and his gunner both survived that landing. And he was a prisoner on Formosa for a little while, and then he was transported to, I think, Japan, one of the Japanese islands south of the main island, and he was a prisoner of war from then until liberation time.

And Ralph, incidentally he lived in Pampa for years and years and years.

**MR. FIELDS:** Really.

**MR. MORRIS:** When he wrote this little account, he wrote this for one of our

air group reunions recounting his story, he was living in Pampa at the time of that. And when we had our — when I hosted the squadron here in 2000, Ralph was here for it. He had five or six sons, I think, that all grew up in Pampa.

**MR. FIELDS:** Well, I should be able to track those folks down.

**MR. MORRIS:** He died about — well, he became ill. He was not well when he was here in 2000, and he became ill shortly after that. Moved over to Oklahoma with one of his sons, and he died three or four years ago, but he survived the Japanese.

**MR. FIELDS:** There's a book called Autobiography of a Tailhooker, by Don Monson, whom you obviously knew.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes. Don was a very close friend of mine. He was a dive bomber pilot, and he was the one that was flying the dive bomber when we made the long search mission, up looking for Japanese fleet, and he's the one that landed just ahead of me when I ran out of gas in the arresting cables. I remained friends with Don. I lost track of him for a number of years. But somehow we restored contact, and he wrote me a letter or two, and I responded to his letter, looked up his story in my logbook.

**MR. FIELDS:** And he has an account on page 38 of his memoirs about your mission together.

**MR. MORRIS:** And he's printed a part of my letter to him about that episode. He remained as a career Navy officer, became a captain, commanded a couple of ships, not an aircraft carrier, but commanded other line vessels.

**MR. FIELDS:** These are a couple of photographs I think that you had.

**MR. MORRIS:** Okay. This particular photograph is when we made the run

down into the South China Sea. And I don't remember whether that particular smoke plume there, whether that's coming from a ship that we sunk or not. We went on down to Hainan which is right — is an island just off of Saigon. The air group did. I wasn't on that particular run. But they blew up a refinery which was on Hainan Island off of Saigon. And that looks like probably the fire from that refinery which they set on fire. It says Saigon French INOO china. So that would have been during one of the — either our first or second run into the South China Sea.

**MR. FIELDS:** These photographs are from Don Monson's book?

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, okay.

**MR. FIELDS:** Or I assume they are.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah. Well, they are.

**MR. FIELDS:** On page 41 there's a reference to a Newquist. Were you on that mission?

**MR. MORRIS:** I was on that mission. Jim Newquist — and I can tell you a story about Jim Newquist.

Jim Newquist was on the Washington State football team in 1941 when Texas University had that great number one team in the country that year.

Jim was the captain of the Washington State football team, and UT beat them 66 to 6.

**MR. FIELDS:** Wow.

**MR. MORRIS:** And we used to have a lot of talk about -- he said, well, that was the best football team that I ever saw in my college career, but they weren't that much better than we were.

But Jim got a direct hit on one of those flights in the South China —



well, hold on a sec — on Formosa. Yeah, that's where that was. Takao. That's what I was thinking about awhile ago, Takao Harbor. Jim got a direct hit.

Another one of our squadron buddies, old George Center got a direct hit on that Formosa-Takao run also.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tom, here's a picture of an SB2C Helldiver. You say that's not you piloting.

**MR. MORRIS:** That's not me. That's another — another of our Air Group 80 pilots. His name was Charlie Shufford. Charlie hufford. He was a little behind me. He joined the squadron a little late, but that's Charlie Shufford, and that's a typical picture of the SB2C the Helldiver.

**MR. FIELDS:** And I believe this canopy folded down whenever the rear gunner engaged the machine guns — 30 caliber.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, so he had -- to engage his machine guns, that canopy folded down so — it slid down out the of way so he could fire his machine guns in all directions, except forward.

**MR. FIELDS:** As I told you, I'm one of the few men probably in town or in the Panhandle that's flown in the backseat of an SB2C Helldiver.

**MR. MORRIS:** Is that right?

**MR. FIELDS:** We have — the Confederate Air Force wing that I was Wing Leader of operates the only one left in the world that flies.

**MR. MORRIS:** Is that right?

**MR. FIELDS:** So I got to fly in the back seat of it.

**MR. MORRIS:** That was when it was down at Midland when they were

stationed at Confederate Air Force at Midland.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir. And this aircraft is stationed at Graham presently.

**MR. MORRIS:** It is?

**MR. FIELDS:** Yeah.

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, I've seen it then.

**MR. FIELDS:** You sure have.

**MR. MORRIS:** I've seen that aircraft.

**MR. FIELDS:** And this is a color photo of an SB2C over the  
Ticonderoga.

**MR. MORRIS:** Over the Ticonderoga. You can see where all of this  
right side of the photograph — this is — over here to your left is the  
outside elevator that took the flight -- the planes from the flight deck  
to the hangar deck. That's the aft side elevator, and the forward  
elevator is just out beyond your vision here in the forward part.  
And this is — this is about -- this is after the second kamikaze had  
dived through the superstructure.

**MR. FIELDS:** Okay.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah. That's taken from another ship. Ole George  
Center got me that picture.

**MR. FIELDS:** And this is a clipping from the VB80 reunion that you  
hosted here in Amarillo?

**MR. MORRIS:** I hosted here in Amarillo in the year 2000. And we still  
had — out of the 36, we still had about 18 or 20 pilots who made  
that reunion, and we've lost most of them since then. We only have  
about four left now.

**MR. FIELDS:** And this is a photograph of — is that VB80?

**MR. MORRIS:** That was VB80 at the very beginning when we completed the organization of the VB80. I don't see a date on that, but that would be about when we commissioned the Ticonderoga. It would have been in April or so 1944.

**MR. FIELDS:** And there is Lieutenant JG S.T. Morris.

**MR. MORRIS:** I'm in there. Our Skipper was Anderson, and Lassater was our executive officer. Both of them were Annapolis graduates. And a lot of these guys, well, they are just mostly all gone. Mostly all gone.

**MR. FIELDS:** Here's a clipping that you had shown me of when the kamikazes hit the Ticonderoga.

**MR. MORRIS:** This was a newspaper story that was July 19 — well, it's a strange date. It's dated in Washington July 19, but the actual date of the kamikaze attack on the Ticonderoga was January 21, 1945. I don't know. I don't know how I happened to come by that. It was in a New Orleans paper. It had a pretty good account of the kamikaze attack, and I guess that's why I kept it.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir. There is a photograph off the Ticonderoga website, I guess fully decked out with —

**MR. MORRIS:** Everything loaded, everything onboard. And for anybody's orientation, if it means anything, this is the fantail, the landing, you would come in on — this the bow up here at the top. This is the island structure here.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** So you would land — the ship would be going forward and

the landing approach would be like this.

**MR. FIELDS:** Do you always turn the ship into the wind for landing?

**MR. MORRIS:** Always. They always made it — you tried to get — they tried to get us 24, 25, to 28 knots wind speed over the deck, and that made it much easier for your landing, so you would have the deck wind speed plus your own air speed, so it gave you considerable margin.

**MR. FIELDS:** That's the Murderer's Row photograph that we've already looked at I believe.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, that's in Ulithi Lagoon.

**MR. FIELDS:** There's the Ticonderoga off San Diego, I guess, heading off to the war?

**MR. MORRIS:** That's pretty similar to the one we saw awhile ago. It looks like those were taken just two different views at the same time. One is looking from aft and one is looking from fore.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, sir. Yeah, that's the same picture. That's as we headed out from San Diego headed for the Pacific.

**MR. FIELDS:** There's a Hellcat. That, for all we know is —

**MR. MORRIS:** Now wait a minute. I'm wrong on that. That's later. That's September — well, that date doesn't seem right, but that's probably what it was, when we were headed out from San Diego.

**MR. FIELDS:** There's an F6F with the island on the Ticonderoga?

**MR. MORRIS:** With the island in the background. I have an auxiliary tank on there. They loaded with — had an auxiliary tank and also — well, I don't see any rockets in the -- we later put on rocket launchers on our F6's

so we could have 6 rockets under each wing 6, 50 caliber machine guns, carried 2, 500-pound GP bombs and an auxiliary fuel tank.

**MR. FIELDS:** Fully loaded.

**MR. MORRIS:** Fully loaded. But that one doesn't have anything in the rocket launchers.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you use rockets on Iwo Jima?

**MR. MORRIS:** Not on Iwo Jima. We did as we went up the Ryukyu chain.

We used rockets firing on all the little vessels we could find. They weren't too accurate, frankly. Those rockets didn't have a guidance system, so you had to aim them with the airplane.

**MR. FIELDS:** Be right on your target, I guess?

**MR. MORRIS:** Right on your target.

**MR. FIELDS:** Here are aircrewmembers at a briefing in November of '44. Do you recognize any of those young fellows?

**MR. MORRIS:** No, I don't. I don't recognize them. All of those are aircrewmembers, and at that time I didn't have any direct relationship with the aircrewmembers because I was a fighter pilot and didn't have an aircrew.

**MR. FIELDS:** Okay.

**MR. MORRIS:** Let's see. Those could have been — well, the answer is I can't identify any of them.

**MR. FIELDS:** Here's just another picture of the Ticonderoga before the first strike against the Japanese, camouflage painting.

**MR. MORRIS:** Uh-huh. yeah. Okay.

**MR. FIELDS:** Here's a photograph of the Yasoshima?

**MR. MORRIS:** All right. November 25, yeah. Okay.

**MR. FIELDS:** And there's a picture of the Ticonderoga after she was hit by a kamikaze on fire?

**MR. MORRIS:** Uh-huh. Yeah, that's — let's see. Yeah, that — this is a very good picture, Ken, because this is after the first kamikaze. You see, all of the aft part of the deck, all the way from the island structure back, is fully loaded with aircraft. They were getting ready for the afternoon takeoff. The first kamikaze went through the flight deck forward of the island. So that's a good — this is after he had hit, of course, and the ship was on fire. His actual point of impact was about where you see the smoke billowing up there at the very left side of the photograph.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, that's a real good — you can see what broken overcast we had that day, broken clouds.

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir. There's another photograph from the island.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah. This was after the first one. You can see how far forward he hit. He is way up here to the forward elevator.

**MR. FIELDS:** There's a gun tub. Are those bofers guns?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, those are .44s.

**MR. FIELDS:** Was that the type of gun tub that —

**MR. MORRIS:** No, then we had the other gun carriers along all the sides of the flight deck, the 20 millimeters, all of those were manned by Marines.

**MR. FIELDS:** So the 20 millimeter gun tub is where you were when — —

**MR. MORRIS:** That's where I was when the second kamikaze hit.

**MR. FIELDS:** — the second one hit. There's another picture; I'm assuming they had both hit by that time?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah. She's actually over into a little bit — yeah, because she's rolled over. You can see she's at least 10 degrees list, but she's listed to the port instead of the starboard. No, no, that's right. No, she's listed to starboard.

These were — we had shoved most of the aircraft off the deck by that time. There's still some up there forward. Yeah, she was over in a list, about a 10-degree list at that time.

**MR. FIELDS:** And there's probably an earlier photograph with really a heavy smoke cloud. Would that have been from the first kamikaze or the second strike?

**MR. MORRIS:** So much of the ship is covered by smoke I can't tell for sure, but it looks like -- no, Ken, I think this is after the second one had hit, but I can't be sure about that.

**MR. FIELDS:** Sure. That's just a diagram from the Puget Sound Navy yard of their recreation of where the strikes were.

**MR. MORRIS:** Uh-huh. Yep. We didn't suffer much damage aft of the island. Most of the damage was forward of the island. The fire got all the way nearly down to the third deck before we got the fires out.

**MR. FIELDS:** How many decks were there?

**MR. MORRIS:** Six decks all together, but the next deck would have been the magazine deck. It got down to that deck.

**MR. FIELDS:** That would have been the time to go swimming, I guess?

**MR. MORRIS:** We got it flooded, got the ship flooded above that deck.

**MR. FIELDS:** There's another photo of the damage.

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, yeah, that's —

**MR. FIELDS:** Is that in the hangar deck?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yeah, that's looking right down through the hangar deck where he went down and exploded.

**MR. FIELDS:** And the last photograph is the island.

**MR. MORRIS:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, boy, that was something else. I don't know how any of the guys survived in that island.

**MR. FIELDS:** Where would Captain Kiefer have been?

**MR. MORRIS:** He would have been right up here at the very top. His quarters would have been at the very top — well, not the absolute top deck. The navigator would have been above him, I think. I had forgotten how much it did destroy that island.

**MR. FIELDS:** It sure did, didn't it?

**MR. MORRIS:** Behind — this is the actual island structure itself, and this is a big smoke stack that's just aft of it out on the starboard side from the island.

Yeah, I don't know how anybody survived that.

**MR. FIELDS:** Did you have occasion to serve on any carrier other than the Ticonderoga?

**MR. MORRIS:** Yes, in January, 1945, the Ticonderoga was sent back to the States for a refit, and our air group was then assigned to the carrier Hancock, which, as I mentioned earlier, was the original name of the Ticonderoga. The later-named Hancock was commissioned after the Ticonderoga. From the Hancock, we flew the first carrier based raids on Tokyo that had taken place since Japan was hit by the B-25's of Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle, flying off a carrier in 1942. I don't recall a single Jap



plane coming up in opposition to our Tokyo raid.

I finished the war with the rank of Lt. Sr. Grade, having flown over fifty (50) missions in the Pacific combat zone and made one hundred eleven (111) carrier landings, some of them night landings.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tom, here's a reproduction of VB80 patch. Who designed that; do you know?

**MR. MORRIS:** Our logo?

**MR. FIELDS:** Yes, sir.

**MR. MORRIS:** One of the guys in the squadron, but I don't know who it was. Yeah, that's our — that's our logo.

**MR. FIELDS:** I'm going to make a copy of that and put it on the cover of this interview that we will put together.

**MR. MORRIS:** Okay, that will be great.

**MR. FIELDS:** Tom, is there -- you've had, in addition to a career as a distinguished naval aviator, you've had a law career that nobody can touch, and you've been one of my lawyer heroes all of my life.

**MR. MORRIS:** I appreciate that. I've had more than my share of luck during life. I've had vast experience. Very few people have had the opportunities that I have to do things and to achieve things. I don't regard World War II as anything outstanding. I was not a super pilot. I could fly an airplane all right, but I wasn't a super pilot. I had my career interrupted, as you know, from a mid-air collision. But I don't take any credit for all of that. I think all of us, the United States was almost to a man united during those years, and everybody in the country was dedicated to one thing, and that was defeating our enemies:

Germany and Japan. So all of us were just doing what we knew we had to do. So I don't regard it as heroism. Yeah, we had some risks, some high risks, and some of us took more risks than others and some of us got hurt more than others and that sort of thing, but we were all in the same boat. And when they call it the Greatest Generation, that's probably a good designator.

It was a great generation, but it was because we were required to do what we did. We had to do it. There wasn't any alternative.

**MR. FIELDS:** Well, I have to rank you with the two men I admire most in my life, and one is, of course, my Dad.

**MR. MORRIS:** Yep.

**MR. FIELDS:** A B17 pilot.

**MR. MORRIS:** For four years he was in the air force. Four years, wasn't it?

**MR. FIELDS:** He was in there for the duration of the war, heading for the Philippines when the war broke out.

And I have always said that I was privileged to be raised up in the household of my hero.

I will add another privilege in my life, and that's to be a friend of and partner with another of my heroes, and that's Tom Morris. Thank you, Tom, for doing what you did then and thank you for sharing it with us today.

**MR. MORRIS:** Well, Ken, I appreciate it very much, and I hope it may be worth something for somebody.

**MR. FIELDS:** No question, sir. Thanks, Tom.

**MR. MORRIS:** Thank you.

*(End of interview.)*