

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Jack M. Lyons

Rockport, Texas

April 27, 2018

U.S. Navy

USS Essex, CV-9

Air Group 83

Flight Squadron 83

60 Combat Missions

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is April 27, 2018. I am interviewing Mr. Jack M. Lyons by telephone. His phone number is 361-450-0015. His address is 458 Augusta Drive, Rockport, Texas, 78382. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

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

Mr. Lyons:

Well I appreciate that, thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is okay with you.

Mr. Lyons:

Alright.

Mr. Misenhimer:

"Agreement Read"

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Lyons:

That's fine, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I need to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back in contact with a veteran he's moved or something. So do you have a son or a daughter or someone we could contact if we needed to, to find you?

Mr. Lyons:

Yes, I have a daughter that lives here in Rockport.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's her name?

Mr. Lyons:

Lynn Powers, her phone number is 303-748-6337.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is her address?

Mr. Lyons:

Well right now (*laugh*) their house is under construction here. Her present address is 7 Pelican Drive. And their home is about one quarter built, it is being built within two or three blocks of where they are now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what town is that?

Mr. Lyons:

That's still Rockport, Rockport, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But she's got an area code of 303.

Mr. Lyons:

303, but that's her cell phone number which she has kept and it was in Colorado.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what is your birthdate?

Mr. Lyons:

March 18, 1924.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. Lyons:

I was born in a little town called Homer, H-o-m-e-r, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Lyons:

I had a sister who is deceased.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No brothers?

Mr. Lyons:

No brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Lyons:

My mother's name was Virginia, you want her maiden name or just her first name?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Just her first name.

Mr. Lyons:

Virginia. And my dad's name was Joe.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you grew up during the depression, how did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Lyons:

Well it was, we had a nice life even though we didn't have very much. They rented apartments and we moved from place to place. We struggled but we came through fine. Things were not good in Homer but we moved to Shreveport from Homer. And things were not good there for work, so my dad moved us to California where my mother's uncle lived and we went out there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Lyons:

He was a salesman, furniture salesman primarily.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did y'all have a garden?

Mr. Lyons:

Not at the start, we did a little later when he could afford to buy a little piece of property.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go to high school?

Mr. Lyons:

In Long Beach, California at Woodrow Wilson High School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate there?

Mr. Lyons:

In June of 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now December 7, '41 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Lyons:

Oh yes, very definitely.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you hear and how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Lyons:

Well I thought I would certainly be going into the service at my young age. And in order to avoid being drafted I wanted to enlist in the Naval Aviation program, which I did in August of '42.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So what date did you go into the service then?

Mr. Lyons:

August 17, 1942.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And that was the Navy?

Mr. Lyons:

That was the Navy, V-5 Program.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is that program?

Mr. Lyons:

It was an aviation cadet program to teach us how to fly and a lot of academic stuff as well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did you have boot camp?

Mr. Lyons:

No we didn't have a boot camp, but we had what they called a pre-flight school. Which mine was in Del Monte, California. And it's just like a boot camp, a "torture chamber" we called it (*laughter*). But it got us in real good shape. And we were there about three months in March of '43, Del Monte Pre-Flight School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Lyons:

Well from then we went to primary training and that was in Hutchinson, Kansas. And we were there for about three months as well. And that was for the Yellow Peril, we called them, the Stearman bi-wing airplane. We flew those, that's where we really learned to fly. Although I learned to fly in November of '42 when I went to a, Navy sent us to a CPT program they called

it, Civilian Pilot Training. We learned to fly Cubs, Piper Cubs. And then the next plane we flew was the Stearman at primary in Hutchinson.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How would that Stearman fly?

Mr. Lyons:

Well, we got taken for an acrobatic exhibition by the instructors on the first flight or two, you know with all the aerobatics. And once we learned to fly it was a nice plane, nice to fly once we soloed. They had no, you know, nothing but simple instruments and the communication between the instructor and the cadet was a Gosport tube.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it like to solo?

Mr. Lyons:

Scary (*laughter*). Scary, but as you got into the flying of it and everything, the landing of course was a little frightening but we got down fine the first time. And then from then on it went very well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That Stearman's a fairly large airplane.

Mr. Lyons:

It's a great airplane. They still have some flying around now. I think there might even be one in Corpus.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think there is, yes.

Mr. Lyons:

Yep, that was a good plane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think they've got several there at the *Lexington* just sitting in there. But I think they've got one that's flying also.

Mr. Lyons:

Yeah, they have one I think on the *Lexington* here in Corpus. And they have a torpedo bomber. And then they have a couple of later trainers than what I flew. And then they have some jets, you know exhibition type planes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what was your next training after that?

Mr. Lyons:

Next training we went to Beeville, Texas and that was for instrument flight training.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do there?

Mr. Lyons:

We were there, I think just a month or six weeks. The plane we flew there was a Vultee single wing plane, with both a passenger and a pilot. And the hood, in the back seat where the pilot flew they had a hood that they put over you when you had to take your examinations for the instrument flying. That was a tough course. That took a lot of doing and we flew Link Trainers there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was some of the training you had there?

Mr. Lyons:

Well we had to fly patterns under a hood. We had to fly the Link Trainers with an instructor outside of course and fly instruments as they directed us. But then when we got into the airplane itself they put a hood, we had to pull a hood over us. And then the instructor gave us patterns to fly. And so we had to do that, you know, get our air speed and all that stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you learned how to fly by instruments there too then?

Mr. Lyons:

Yes, yes sir. And it came in handy later on. And from there went to Kingsville. And I graduated, got my wings and commission in Kingsville on December 23, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's when you got your wings and got your commission?

Mr. Lyons:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you were commissioned what, an Ensign?

Mr. Lyons:

Ensign.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have a big ceremony when they did that?

Mr. Lyons:

It's kind of hard to remember, there was quite a number of us that you know graduated at the same time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Lyons:

We were presented with our wings and not a plaque but a notice of some kind designating that we were now Ensigns in the United States Naval Reserve.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Lyons:

Well from there I went to Chicago. And stayed there about two weeks checking out on carrier landings on Lake Michigan. They had a converted, kind of a converted cruiser or a cargo ship they'd put a flight deck on it. And everybody had to go and make six carrier landings on this boat or this ship on Lake Michigan.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it like to make your first carrier landing?

Mr. Lyons:

Scary (*laughter*), to say the least.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What plane were you flying there?

Mr. Lyons:

There I was supposed to be flying a F6F, but all the F6Fs were tied up so I had to use an SNJ to land on the carrier. And of course they're a lot lighter in weight and you had to get down fast. We were there for, the weather was bad so it took us a couple of weeks to get through that. And then from there we went to operational training and that was in Melbourne, Florida.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do in that training?

Mr. Lyons:

That's where I was introduced to the F6F. I'm sorry I got that ahead of, Melbourne was after Corpus and carrier checkout was after Melbourne. We were in Melbourne about two months on gunnery, and navigation, tactics and we flew F6Fs and fired at a gunnery screen pulled by another plane.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That F6F was a pretty high powered plane, how was it to fly?

Mr. Lyons:

Lovely, great, one of the greatest planes made I thought. It was a two thousand horsepower, twenty-eight hundred RPMs. And it looked like a monster compared to the SNJ we had been flying. And we didn't get a lot of instruction on flying that thing, they kind of like, you heard the story they give you a handbook and say here it is, now fly it tomorrow. They introduced us to cockpit checkout and all that. It was fun to fly. And it wasn't scary at all after you flew it a few times, actually scary only coming in for landings.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you land the F6F on the carrier?

Mr. Lyons:

Oh yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I mean in your training, not later on, I mean in your training.

Mr. Lyons:

Yes we did. We did that after I got into the Air Group. From Melbourne I went on leave and then from there, I went on leave in California, and then from there I went to Norfolk to get my orders. And from there I was sent to Atlantic City, New Jersey to join this Fighter Air Group, Fighter Squadron, flying Hellcats. And while we were there we landed on a carrier, half a dozen times. Actually we landed on a carrier, I don't remember the name of it. It was off the coast there of Atlantic City, but we landed on it half a dozen times. And that was in January of

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Lyons:

And then I'm backtrack, from Melbourne we went to check out on the carrier on Lake Michigan in Chicago. I got that backwards. And then from Chicago I went on home and had two weeks

leave. And then I got married, I got married in Las Vegas because we didn't have a lot of time. Then from Long Beach I went to Norfolk and got my orders and then I went to Atlantic City. And from Atlantic City we went to Ayer, Massachusetts. And that was to form the Air Group, where the torpedo bombers and the dive bombers, we made one Air Group with the fighters.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was that Air Group, what number?

Mr. Lyons:

Eighty-three.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, then what happened?

Mr. Lyons:

Well we were there for quite a while until ..., we were in Atlantic City about three months and then we were in Ayer about three months and then in November of '44 we were gonna ship out from San Diego. So we had to get to the west coast the best way we could and board our ship in November of '44, board the ship that took us overseas. When we got overseas we were on a Naval Air Station on Maui, the island of Maui in Hawaii. And we were there for a couple of months doing further training, training as an air group. Mock attacks and mock conditions of what we were going to be facing. And then we left the Hawaiian Islands and went by ship to Guam in March, first of March 1945. And then we went from Guam to Ulithi, which is a staging point for the 3rd and 5th Fleet Task Forces. Hundreds of ships there, all kinds of ships. And we boarded the *Essex* first part of March 1945, our air group did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm sorry, what ship was that you boarded?

Mr. Lyons:

The *Essex*, CV-9, aircraft carrier *Essex*. The same carrier as the *Lexington*, only it's the *Essex*.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go ahead.

Mr. Lyons:

We boarded that ship and got all checked in and everything. And we shipped out towards Okinawa on, I think it was about the 12th, 10th or 12th of March. And we were air support for Okinawa all the way through, the invasion of Okinawa. And as a matter of fact, as a side note, my first combat mission was on my 21st birthday and we were headed to Tokyo to raise a little heck there with bombs and strafing and what have you. But most of our combat was in the Okinawa campaign and we hit the Japanese homeland islands numerous times with the bombs, strafing, and rockets. And we used a lot of napalm on Okinawa because the Japanese were in caves. And our Army and Marine Infantry people were having a heck of a time taking the island because these guys were bedded down in caves. So we had to fly over and drop napalm and other bombs on them to help our guys move forward. In fact we got a letter after the war from one of the guys that was on the ground, the infantryman there. Said that we came within a hundred yards of them and dropping our stuff. So that's pretty close contact work.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Lyons:

Well that's a, we hit Okinawa. Sometimes we flew two hops a day from the carrier to Okinawa for support for the ground troops. And we shot a lot of planes down over there, on the ground and in the air. Then we moved on over to the main islands and we hit all three of the main islands, Kyushu and Honshu and Hokkaido, we spent many flights over those. The one thing that was very distinct in my mind and it probably was a great thing. The Japanese were going to have a last ditch stand with what was left of their fleet, naval fleet. And they had the *Yamato*, which is the biggest battleship built and about four cruisers and maybe six destroyers that were

headed to Okinawa from Japan to annihilate as many Americans as they could. And in fact we were told their guns were loaded with shrapnel to see how many people they could kill. Well I and other people were sent on a search trying to find this group of ships that had left the main island. And I was lucky enough to find them on my search. And there was a secondary group of planes that are higher altitude than we were, they were like at twenty thousand and we were at about ten. And I had to make a report to the people above us who could carry that report further back to our fleet. And successfully that happened. And shortly after the Admirals got the information they sent every airplane available after this Japanese fleet. And we sunk the *Yamato* and I think it was two cruisers and some.... It damaged them all, but it really sunk the battleship, which was the main thing and a couple of cruisers and two or three destroyers. And that was a highlight for me to be able to pass that information on back to the people so that they could attack them. There were four planes in my group and we didn't have enough gas to attack them by ourselves and get back to our carrier. So we just came on home after we transferred the news to the upper group. And the rest of our air group were part of this completely sky full of airplanes that attacked Japanese fleet. A lot of torpedoes hit, bombs, and the usual strafing. That was a kind of key thing I think it saved a lot of lives. Say they had gotten through and gotten to Okinawa and it also kind of ended their naval warfare.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Lyons:

After Okinawa was secured by our country, we kept making runs on the main islands, bombing, strafing, rockets. And another highlight was when we were on our way to Tokyo, a group of us, but we usually flew in either groups of four or groups of twelve. And this was a group of twelve of us were headed to Tokyo. And over the radio came an announcement that the Japanese had surrendered. Well we were on our way to, you know hit them. So we were told not to go and to turn around and come back. So we dropped our armament and our ammunition and

bombs and stuff in the ocean because we couldn't land the ships back on our carrier with all that armament on them. Because it could blow up our ship if we tried that. So we got landed and we were all very rejoiceful that it was over because we were out there a little longer than most air groups were. Normally an air group's out there six months or less. And we were out there about almost seven months. Then the next day we were sent to fly over Japan and see if they really meant it, so we did. And from then on it was just fun. We could flat head over there and we could see people on the ground waving at us. And we found a prisoner of war camp and we dropped them cigarettes and candy and stuff like that. And of course when we first went over we were down low on the ground and you could see some people waving like they were happy and others that were shaking their fist or maybe even throwing rocks or shooting a gun at us. But all in all I think everybody was glad that it was over. Because Tokyo was completely flat. The B-29s had come in there and wiped them out with fire bombs. And one other interesting incident is we found the Emperor's castle. And it wasn't touched. The entire grounds had not been touched by any kind of fire power. And I don't know why but I assume it's something to do with politics, I don't know. But I know it was the only left un-hit. And that was done by orders from headquarters I'm sure. Then we had one guy, when we were flying over Tokyo, had engine trouble and he had to land at one of their airfields in a Hellcat. And he told the story that he landed and taxied up, I don't remember what part was wrong with his plane, but he taxied up and the Japanese were very polite, very nice, very, you know courtesy and still military to him. And made sure he was comfortable and everything and they someway or other got what he needed for his plane and he took off and came back to our air group. But that happened to a guy in Okinawa too. He was a Corsair pilot and he got shot up and he landed at the airfield in Okinawa while we were still invading (*laugh*). And he has written a story about it where he even got out, he wanted to see what these ground soldiers went through. So he went out into a couple of foxholes with them. And got to know them and when they got his part that he needed he took off and came back to the carrier as well. But I thought that was very interesting that he did that, he wanted to get a taste of the ground war and he did. To me those guys just deserve everything they could

possibly get, that went in on those ground invasions. The hell they went through and the things they saw, these dead bodies and everything. As a pilot you didn't see that. But I have to admire anybody that went through that kind of war and came back okay. And there were quite a few that did and there were quite a few that didn't. It was a tough way to fight I'll tell you that. If there ever was another war and I was in it I would certainly want to go the way I went as a Naval Fighter Pilot, even though our ships you know got bombed and kamikazes came in and all that stuff. So some people did get hurt. But if you didn't get shot down or crash or something you came back to a place where you could sleep at night anyway. And had good food, most of the time. But I can't say enough about the guys that do the ground fighting, that has got to be a horrible experience for them. But anyway, after the peace was signed in the harbor there in Tokyo with MacArthur and all, we were told to come back to the States in the middle of September of '45. And we landed in Seattle at the Naval Air Station in Seattle. I can't think of the name of it now. But anyway, we landed there and we had to turn in all of our gear that we had, winter flying suits, summer flying suits, everything down to your Navy watch, we had to hand it back. And the guys separated from the service or they got orders to go elsewhere. And I was an instructor. I went home for about a month and then went down to Pensacola and instructed in gunnery and tactics in Pensacola for about two months, three months, a cadet program there. And that was flying SNJs again. My wife became pregnant during that period and I had already been accepted as a regular Navy prospect, had been agreed that I could stay in, regular not Reserve. And I would have to go to more schooling and all that. But I had to decline that, didn't have to but I did to get back home because she wanted to be with her family when we had the baby. So I declined the nomination and got out of the Navy on February 6, 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is that when you got discharged?

Mr. Lyons:

Yes, February 6, 1946. And I was a weekend warrior in the Reserve for several months after I got out. And after I got back to California I went to work for the Ford Motor Company and I

was flying on weekends. And as years went by with the Ford Motor Company, one of the reasons my wife didn't think we should stay in the Navy is well I'd be traveling all over the world, you know. And so I went to work for the Ford Motor Company and as it turns out we were travelling with the Ford Motor Company quite a bit. Not in other parts of the world but all over the United States. And I was in the industrial engineering end of the business for awhile and then I went into the plant management. And I managed six different plants for the company, automotive assembly plant. And then I just finally got out in January 1, 1980, I left the company after thirty-two and a half years. And I've never flown except commercially since I was a weekend warrior in 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now let me go back and ask you some questions.

Mr. Lyons:

Sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were there on Okinawa or on the *Essex* how many total combat missions did you fly?

Mr. Lyons:

I think it was about sixty.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And which was the worst one of those?

Mr. Lyons:

Well I think when we were giving ground support to the ground troops, I can't name exactly which one, but that was close. Because we were going right down low and dropping our bombs and napalm and strafing. And we were under fire quite a bit. And Japanese were pretty accurate with their anti-aircraft guns. And we got shot at over Honshu I think it was one time, that would just barely miss my group. We got out of there in a hurry because we're just flying down minding our own business and here comes this anti-aircraft stuff right close to us. I think the air support for the ground troops was probably as close as being dangerous as anything. Although

we hit a lot of airfields on the main islands and shipyards, we hit shipyards over there too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now was the *Essex* ever attacked by kamikazes?

Mr. Lyons:

Oh you bet, we didn't get hit, but we were attacked, the whole fleet that was there at that time was attacked numerous times. And fortunately our ship didn't get hit, but the one in front of us, and I believe it was the *Franklin* had two kamikazes direct hits. And they were just ahead of us. And we were still under attack, but you know when you're young you don't think too well and we went up to see what was going on. And we could see people in the water from the other ship going by us. And the destroyers picked them all up I hope. But oh yes we were under fire numerous times by kamikazes. And one time we had not only kamikazes but they had a submarine alert too. So we didn't know whether to go up or down to be safe. But most of the time we went below if we were under attack. We had a near miss but we didn't get hit. But a lot of ships around us did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many planes did you shoot down?

Mr. Lyons:

I don't like to talk about that. Let's just say a couple.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever fight the kamikazes?

Mr. Lyons:

(Airplane sound) That sounds like an airplane going low over my house *(laugh)*, speaking of kamikazes *(laugh)*. Yes, one time. One time we caught some that were up overhead, I happened to be up in the air at the time. But they didn't do much fighting because they had one destination and that was to hit a ship with their airplanes. That was their orders, don't come back, hit a ship when you go down.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on September 2nd when they had the surrender in Tokyo Bay were you all in Tokyo Bay?

Mr. Lyons:

I flew over, I wasn't there. We flew over, but I wasn't you know at the signing of course. But our fleet was there, our ship was there and our planes were there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Could you see much of the ceremony?

Mr. Lyons:

Not really because we were told not to get down close, interfere. I know one, not at that ceremony but prior to that ceremony, we were flying pretty low and I looked off to one side and I think we were lower than these towers for radar and cell phones are used now, we were down below those things and that was low. Really low. But we were told not to interfere, not to get down near the ceremony.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Lyons:

Well it was good, it was good. We had a bunch of good guys. And our particular air group, Fighting 83, we lost six pilots. The torpedo bombers and a bomber per say, the dive bombers they lost quite a few. Torpedo bombers and dive bombers and the Corsairs lost a few too. We were lucky, we didn't lose, we lost six.

(End of side one of tape.)

(Beginning of side two of tape.)

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, go ahead what happened next?

Mr. Lyons:

Well we were very low flying and I've just given you an example of how low we were. It was a

real thrill for us to find this prisoner of war camp and be able to drop them stuff after the war. And we got another letter from one of them saying that how much they appreciated the attention that we gave them. Because we went over a couple of days and dropped them stuff and they wanted to know news and everything because they weren't aware that it was over, but we told them. And they said that many of the Japanese feared we little guys more so than they did the big bombers, the B29s, because they probably knew they were coming and got prepared for any attack that they would make, which was always at high altitude. And we came in and they didn't even know we were coming. So they were frightened of that. But all in all I think our air group was very well satisfied with what we did and had good morale.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Lyons:

Yes, oh yes we heard Tokyo Rose (*laugh*) trying to butter us up and tell us we were going to get in trouble and lose the war and all that stuff, but we didn't pay any attention to it (*laughter*).

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Lyons:

Yes, I think we did. I think we did, but there wasn't any ceremony about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any kind of a ceremony when you did?

Mr. Lyons:

No, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April 12th of 1945 President Roosevelt died, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Lyons:

We sure did, sure did. We were very, very sad about that because everybody thought the world

of him, at least that was in the service that I knew.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then May the 8th of '45 Germany surrendered, did y'all hear about that?

Mr. Lyons:

About what?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Germany surrendering on May the 8th?

Mr. Lyons:

Yes we heard that, we heard that. And we hoped that it would happen where we were sooner than it did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when they dropped the first atomic bomb did y'all hear about that?

Mr. Lyons:

We did. And we heard rumors, that's all we heard were rumors about the bomb. And of course it was the second one that they dropped that ended the war. But yes we learned of them, both of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then August the 15th when Japan surrendered, have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Lyons:

I think we had a little celebration before they surrendered. *(Laughter)* When they told us that they had surrendered, before the ceremony, whatever rubbing alcohol we could find we had a little of aboard ship. At one time as I recall, if you were going on a combat mission you could have a choice of a steak for breakfast, I assume because it might have been your last meal. We had a lot of steaks. And then when you came back you could get, I think it was one or two ounces of some kind of whiskey. And some of us saved a couple of those until the war was over and then we used them to celebrate. *(Laugh)* Just a bunch of young guys you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you in any typhoons over there at all?

Mr. Lyons:

We were in a pretty horrible hurricane anyway. It was so bad that the water was coming over the flight deck. And that's about all I remember about it because we were down below. But we did know that water came up over the flight deck and if you were walking down one of the gangways the boat would go out from under you. Several times you had to go back to where you were going. Hard to walk.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then how long did you stay on the *Essex*, when did you finally leave the *Essex*?

Mr. Lyons:

We left the *Essex*, oh golly, September. I think it was September the 18th or something like that when we flew back to Seattle. We took the planes off of the *Essex* and left them in Seattle. And that's where we all dispersed in different directions.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was like you say September of '45?

Mr. Lyons:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go then?

Mr. Lyons:

I went home for a leave. And that's when my orders were sent to me to go to Norfolk, I'm sorry to Pensacola as an instructor for after the war. So I got time in both Corpus Christi and Pensacola which were Naval cadet training areas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. Lyons:

No. Nope they wouldn't let us keep anything that we had. We had a .38 pistol that we carried when we flew, most of the time, and some of us would liked to have kept that. But they took them back and they took, they even gave us a watch to wear and they took that back. Took all of it, practically everything that they had issued us they took back after we got back to the States. Of course we never used the winter flying gear. We never flew at that altitude for that length of time to need that. But we would have liked to have kept our watches because we saw them when they took them away from us they threw them in a big pile. *(Laugh)* We might just as well of kept them because they probably got thrown away. But no the only thing I can think of, I had a helmet, a helmet and earphones. And I did have my Navy blues and some kakis, but I, you know I used those when I was in Pensacola instructing. And I got to keep those. They're no longer with me, but the buttons off of the Navy blues are still around here, somewhere. And I think an epaulet or two. That's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Lyons:

You know no, not at all. It was you know, jobs were, they're not jobs scarce but not readily available. But after we got back into it, it was okay. Actually had to take a cut in pay because we were getting flight pay and officer's pay in the Navy and to take another job we had to take a cut in pay. But one of the nice things about our group is that we held reunions, I think after the war our first reunion was in 1960 in Chicago. And we had a big turnout of pilots and wives for that. And then we tried to have them every five years in different parts of the country. And we had them in Baltimore, and San Diego, Chicago, Minneapolis. And as long as we could we kept together, in contact. And I'm still in contact with two guys that I flew with. One's in Charlotte, North Carolina and one's in Indiana. We still e-mail back and forth occasionally. Most of the others are gone. We tried to have a reunion in 2008 and there weren't enough, we had it but there were only a handful of pilots there. But interesting thing was that the wives of some of

those deceased pilots sometimes would show up at our reunions. We were that kind of that close knit bunch of people. Oh one really interesting thing that happened over in Japan was the island of Hokkaido, which is the northern most island in Japan, they had a bunch of ferries and went back and forth. We sunk a lot of those. But one of our Corsair's pilot was shot down in a bay there between Hokkaido and Honshu. And he was shot down and got out in his raft and we circled him until we could, as long as we could and we'd still get back to the carrier. So he stayed there and he went ashore and stayed all night and the Japanese were around him but they didn't see him. And Admiral Mitscher, who was kind of in charge of the fleet at that time, we were supposed to leave the next day to go back to the States or go somewhere, go out of that area. So they went back and started circling him again and one of his pilot friends in a Corsair got shot down circling the one that was already in the water. And he didn't survive. And they sent out a, I think they were called OS2U Floatplanes from one of the cruisers to pick up this pilot. And of all things to happen the pilot leaned over to help him out of his raft into the boat and he kicked the throttle. And so the airplane left off by itself and there were two of them in the water at that time. And then they sent out another floatplane that picked both of them up eventually over a period of time. And then they sunk the, the ones that were in that particular flight, sunk the one that got away from them so the Japanese couldn't get it. But that was interesting. We lost three airplanes and got one pilot back, two Corsairs got shot down, one pilot got back, the other one didn't and we lost the floatplane on top of it. But it ended up good, except for the guy that got shot down of course. It was strange things that happen.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Lyons:

Well I was a Lieutenant Junior Grade and while I was a weekend warrior in California I got my full Lieutenant Grade. But I got out of the Navy completely, Naval Reserve, so I didn't pursue it. Stayed in like I would have, came out as a Captain in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Lyons:

Well I have the Silver Star.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you get that for?

Mr. Lyons:

For locating the fleet. And the Distinguished Flying Cross. And I think it was six Air Medals. And then Campaign Ribbons, got the Presidential Unit Citation too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Does the Navy give what they call Battle Stars?

Mr. Lyons:

Yes, yes. Yes you put them on your ribbon, for that particular theatre of action, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you know how many of those you got?

Mr. Lyons:

Oh golly. I think it was two or three.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you got out did you use your G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. Lyons:

I started out using it for education. But my wife, as I mentioned earlier became pregnant so I had to devote most of my time to work. I went to Long Beach Junior College before the war. But I just worked my way up in the Ford Motor Company. But I did not use my G.I. Bill. I could of, but I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else do you recall from your time in the service?

Mr. Lyons:

Well, we lost a few pilots in primary training, that's where we first started flying the bi-wings. Because it was a new thing and I remember that, I don't remember the people, they were in different groups. We lost a couple of pilots in flying lessons. Oh, we had a couple of incidents that were kind of funny but not. Couple of times a guy would land on the carrier *(laugh)* and he didn't safety his guns and spray the deck. Fortunately nobody got hurt. But things like that, crashes on the deck are memorable. Somebody coming in for a landing and didn't make it properly and crashed. I think the camaraderie we had in our squadron was one of the best things. I made some real good friends in that few months we were a fighter squadron, very good friends. Lasted a lifetime for some of them. And our reunions were also very, very good for our morale after the war to relive it again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.?

Mr. Lyons:

No, I did not take that because I'd been to Washington before and I'd seen all those things. It was a pretty rough trip for people, my age anyway to do that. I had friends that did it, but I did not do it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How is your health, are you in pretty good health?

Mr. Lyons:

Well I think so, I have arthritis problems as anyone ninety-four years old probably has. I take a few pills to keep certain things under control, like blood pressure and diabetes two, and cholesterol, things like that. But yes I'm mobile, I get around, I can go places, I do use a cane for safety. But we go out to dinner and don't do much traveling anymore. But I moved around a lot after I got out of the Navy with Ford and even after I left Ford I moved two or three times. Seemed like I never lived anywhere more than about seven years. It made an interesting life, the kids didn't like it too well, but it was good for them too. And I love Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Lyons:

No I didn't. We weren't where they had those. On aboard ship, they didn't come aboard. They were all on land, as far as I know. Oh I know one interesting thing I forgot, when we were anchored in Ulithi before we went into Japan we were watching a movie on the hangar deck and we heard a plane fly over. And all of a sudden we heard a crash. And it was a single kamikaze that had come out of nowhere and hit the carrier next to ours. I think, I'm not sure but I think it was the *Ticonderoga*, I'm not sure. But it killed a few guys. But just one single plane and no one even knew it was anywhere around. That was kind of a jolt (*laugh*), before we even got into the action. We had a night fighter group in our squadron that went out at night and flew over different places. And we lost a couple of those guys. And we had a photographic group that would go over and take pictures of airfields and things. And they flew planes that supposedly had no armor and no ammunition or anything. And they had to fly straight and level over at a certain altitude to take pictures of things we were gonna go and bomb. One of those guys was one of my roommates. And we became great friends, great friends. He's gone though, now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Lyons:

No, did not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well that's all the questions I have unless you've thought of something else.

Mr. Lyons:

Well I think we've covered pretty much everything that I can think of. I'll tell you something interesting.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, what is that?

Mr. Lyons:

How I enlisted. There were four of us guys, high school guys, out of high school, sitting in a yard one day and I made the suggestion that we all go enlist in the Navy. And they agreed, so we went up to L.A. from Long Beach and four of us took the examinations and two of them didn't pass and two of us did. And one of the ones that didn't pass went down and joined the regular Navy as a seaman and the other guy didn't pass it and he wound up going to school for the Navy while we were out in the combat he was going to school and came out as a dentist *(laughter)*. And myself and my buddy we both, actually he went into the Marines instead of the Navy and he got called back in the Korean War and I didn't, fortunately. But it's kind of interesting four guys going up and trying to get enlisted at the same time and we were friends long, long after that too. One thing I forgot to tell you that I was in a group there after the war as a weekend warrior and we were assigned to what they call a squadron, even after the war. And we flew every weekend. And I decided to get out because you're getting older and the planes weren't in great shape, so I declined and got out completely of the Reserve. And you know it wasn't a month after that, that they called that group into Korea. *(Laughter)* So I got out just in time. But that was really a break for me, because my other buddy that stayed in the Marines he got called back into Korea. I didn't have to go there so that was good. Well it was nice talking to you and I look forward to seeing what you've done, put together. And if I can do anything for you or with you let me know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, will do and thanks again for your service to our country and your time today.

Mr. Lyons:

You're certainly welcome and I thank you for calling.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Alright.

(End of interview.)

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July 8, 2018

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