

Walter S. Baker
Narrator

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New York State Military Museum
Interviewers

Interviewed on January 30th, 2003, Approx. 1:15pm
Schuyler Ridge Home
Clifton Park, New York

Q: This is an interview with Walter S. Baker at the Schuyler Ridge Home, Clifton Park, New York. It is January 30th, 2003 approximately 1:15 in the afternoon. The interviewers are Michael Russert and Wayne Clark.

Could you tell me your full name, date of birth and place of birth please?

A: Walter S. Baker full name. Date of birth April 17th, 1916 in Somerset, New Jersey. Actually Peapack which is near Gladstone, New Jersey. Somerset County.

Q: Before you entered military service, what was your educational background?

A: Mostly in photography and I took courses under (unclear) in photography. Of course, I had my high school education. I took courses and this was before I entered the service so I have to be a little careful of this but mostly took place during the military services.

Q: You were in the National Guard from 1936-1939. Why did you join the National Guard?

A: It so happened that I was working with Wall Street as a billing clerk and a clerk typist and a friend of mine came in and a friend of my father's and he talked to me one time and said "Hey, you ought to join the 7th regiment".

Well, I didn't realize what I was getting into. I said "Well, sounds fine the National Guard. I'll join it" So, I did. I joined the National Guard and then I find out it was an elite regiment which looked for people who had money that I didn't have. So, I did join however and it managed to cost me money each year just a little over \$100, I think it was, a year just to stay in the thing.

I enjoyed it very much. I was in a machine gun company. Company M. I became an

Artificer which is between a Private and a Corporal you might say. I set up the machine gun ranges and so forth for the target practice. We had 22 Caliber machine guns but we used a light to show where the bullets were hitting and, of course, if you moved the up and down, left and right mechanism you would see where the bullets would hit.

Since I had more experience steering in the guns, I got into the “360 Club” which makes 360 hits out of 400 which was considered pretty good at that time.

I’ll let you take in on from there.

Q: Since the 7th Regiment was one of the most elite units in the state, how did you get along with the others in the unit?

A: Oh wonderful. They were all great guys. There wasn’t any actual snobbery there in any way and any form. They were “well, what can we do to help you” and so forth.

In fact, I bought my mess jacket. I believe I had a function. They had a special (jacket) you wore at mess in (unclear) in the military services. I bought that second hand from one and they let me have it for a very reasonable price.

Q: Did you attend a lot of their social functions too?

A: I attended a few of their socials mostly however, they held their...oh what was the name of their games there – The Millrose Games. The Millrose Games. I was the photographer (unclear) at that time I was using. We had Jesse Owens and all the rest there. It was very interesting and also, as a photographer, I would go out to Westbury and watch them play polo. The 7th had a very good polo team. I didn’t play polo but I got to go to all the games and I also got tickets to the opera which I wasn’t that enthusiastic about but it was nice to say somebody in the 7th had attended the opera.

Q: How long were you in the New York Guard?

A: Just for three years. That was 1936-1939. I got out because we had a (unclear) come over from England and he used to lecture us on the wars, the past wars and how they were fought and what modern war would be like.

He was saying that we would undoubtedly be drawn into the Second World War. He was venturing how the war would be won and although he didn’t have the extremist view of these Germans, he did believe that they would be strong enough to overcome France.

When the war ended, we were told by the authorities in charge of the 7th Regiment that if we did get in the war the 7th Regiment would be disbanded as such. The 107th

would not longer be the same 7th because they would be taking in people from everywhere. All those who were in the 7th Regiment would be sent immediately to OCS (Officer Candidate School) to become officers. You couldn't very well have a regiment of officers. So, that changed the complexion of the outfit.

I wanted to fly so I thought maybe there's a better way. So, I wanted to join the RAF. I just had very little flying experience. I didn't have enough money to take much in the way of lessons. I think about two or three lessons I had. I thought I could get trained in England or somewhere.

But, a friend of my father's heard about me going into the RAF. His name was Frank Doherty. He had been in the First World War. During the First World War, he had had, I think, about three kills himself. Then he was shot down himself. He was quite a gentleman.

I am going into detail about him. What had happened is that he got shot. How the bullet ever got – it went through his teeth here (points to his teeth). It took out the two front teeth and took off his nose – took off part of his nose – and came up. I don't know how that every happened unless it was shrapnel which is possibly you could feel it (unclear) but the thing is the Germans gave him teeth - made teeth for him and stitched up his nose and he looked like a man of distinction from there on out. His nose was a large very very Roman nose but they took it off and he was really nice looking.

He said "Look Walter, you don't want to go into the RAF. Join the Canadian Air Force. In the Canadian Air Force, they're much more like the Americans and you'll get better pay"

Well, that was alright for me. So, in May of '41, I went up and joined at 1254 Bishop Street. I remember

Q: In what city was that?

A: Montreal. Where do you want me to go from there?

Q: Tell us about your time in the Canadian Air Force. Your training.

A: Well, it was just a wonderful thing all the way through. From there we were sent out to get training in areal combat, not in combat, in navigation and all the things that would be necessary.

Q: What kind of planes did you fly?

A: At that time, I wasn't flying yet. So, this one that we were sent to in Ottawa, not in

Ottawa, in Toronto. In Toronto, there was a fair ground there and at the fair grounds why they took over part of the fair grounds and we had our training in there.

It was good training. My knowledge of military deportment and so forth held me in fairly good stand.

I enjoyed that. I found out one thing. Although they were very fair there to everybody, it didn't pay to be too smart. One fellow I knew – Blanda was his name – he had graduated cum laude would it be from the big university there. What's the name of that again? McGill. He had also played on the hockey team up there. But when they found out he was so smart they told him sorry. We took the Link trainer. You sat in it and just watched the instruments. If you couldn't follow they instruments and use your own feeling you'd be way off.

Actually, that was a farce because Blanda was as sharp as anybody. Being so smart, he was made a navigator because that's where they needed people with brains. Thank you for the McGill!

Q: Did you fly the DeHavilland Tiger Moth?

A: Yes. In fact, that's what I flew mostly.

After I graduated from these ground courses, I went out to Fingal first. I didn't get to fly any planes as Fingal. A friend of mine, Bill Ashworth and I – friends we had up there - we were in what they call security guard training. In security guard, you just ran around with a rifle – which was the kind that had a (unclear) stick into you right here (points to shoulder). It was black and blue by the time you did all your parading. In the American way you held it straight up and there you held it back. Yes, the Enfield Rifle. Anyway, we asked to get a chance to parachute out. They refused and said no there's only one chance you should have. If you make it you may as well do it when there's some use to it. If you don't, here's nothing in it for us.

After that, I was sent to Oshawa, Ontario. Oshawa, Ontario was, at that time, elementary flying which was a flying school which was run by civilians under contract with the government.

The wife of the President of General Motors, I guess, was up there handling this school and her way was to take it to the civilian people. Give these boys anything they want – anything they want let them have and we'll see that they enjoy everything that's done here.

So, sure enough, when we went in first and started flying, it was fun flying the Tiger Moth. I wasn't particularly good on my first few landings because I had a way. You're supposed to land a plane directly into wind. I figured out, well, I couldn't get the

plane to bank enough so you slipped into wind. I would come in and just before I would hit the ground at an angle, I'd twist my rudder and I would put it on the ground.

So, he allowed me to fly. I think I was six and half hours at that time. I'm not sure of that. It was a scary thing for them because I kept coming in the wrong way for awhile.

Anyway, I enjoyed flying there at Oshawa and the wonderful way we were treated. We had a man who was a batman for us who would clean all our clothing and polish our buttons and shine our boots and everything else. Of course, that was because the wife of the president was there.

Q: How were you accepted as an American? Were there any other Americans there?

A: The Americans and Canadians got along very well.

Q: Were there other Americans with you?

A: Oh yes, there were thirty five thousand joined the Canadian Air Force. I think it eventually got up to seventy thousand. I'm not positive of that. Anyway, it was a joy flying with them. I liked that.

Q: What types of planes to you train on?

A: I'll keep things in a little better order for you. I first went out to Fort William in the Tiger Moth and after that I was sent to...wait a minute. Anyway, The Tiger Moth flying was fun. The instructors all of them that I knew there were good at flying. Some of them weren't as experienced as others and hadn't flown much at the time they came there.

We found, for instance, one case, landing on skis. Landing on skis is a very difficult thing to do. You know how they talk about how landing on glassy water is very difficult. Landing on skis can be much harder particularly on a dull day with an overcast where you have no shadows and you can't tell how far down that snow is. You can land way up in the air and so forth.

When you landed on skis your skis sometimes plowed in under the soft snow and you stop rather suddenly. Then you would try pushing and pulling by hand pulling the shift back and forth. You'd finally make it back so you could get off again

That happened at a little field where the instructors particularly would go to have a little relaxation on the weekends when they didn't have to fly. They loved to fly so they go out to Bishop Field and did things like that.

So, anyway, that was nice at Fort William. There was one place that you could.... I

was not the one that first found it another fellow had found it. When you came in to go into this field you went down and you could get under the limbs of the trees and suddenly almost pull up and come out as if you were coming right out of the forest.

I made a bad mistake. The wind was flowing from the back of me instead of with me. The speed of the aircraft is the speed of the aircraft minus or plus the speed of the wind behind or in front of you. So, I judged it wrong and came back and the whole bottoms of the wings were torn down all the way across and when I came in to land at the airport everybody looked at me with this plane with the wings with all this fabric hanging down – they were fabric planes of course. They were pretty nice about it and said well anybody could make a mistake. I don't think that that was reported to any Air Force authority.

As they say, Fort William was also a civilian run place but MacDougall ran it. I don't think that they reported that to MacDougall. Another thing is one time they turned over and made us all civilian ... They decided that they were going to take all these civilian run companies and training stations and turn them into regular Air Force. So when they did that, they sent in senior officers who were very very critical of the way that civilians were running things.

One day, there was a call that came in and somebody on the phone said "There's a plane running on the road right down the road on its wheels. Are they supposed to do that?"

The administrator hearing that said "Did you get the number of the plane?"

"Yes, 4078". It could have been a little different number but it was in that area.

"4078. Who's got 4078?"

"We don't know. It's Doyle's plane"

"Doyle, has he landed yet?"

"No"

"Is Doyle around there?"

That was it. Finally after everybody (unclear) nobody else can take off until Doyle is back in and they're not going to have any flying or anything else. He's not going to put this fellow in jail if he could.

Then somebody from the hanger says "But sir, 4078 is being towed to Winnipeg for repairs"

So, you can see that life was fine at those places. Anything else?

Q: While you were in the Canadian Air Force, where were you on December 7th in '41 and what was your reaction to events that happened at Pearl Harbor?

A: Well, I shouldn't really tell that story. There were four Americans. I went to Trenton flying school and at Trenton why I flew many different kinds of aircraft by the way –all that were in the training command. I flew Avro Anson and before that I flew at Hagersville. Maybe I better go back to there if you don't mind skipping around.

December 7th, 1941, I definitely was in Danville (sp?) and we had a fight between the four Americans and two Canadians who got together and the New Zealanders who were training there with us happened to be primarily New Zealanders.

This isn't nice to put it into print. They were always very envious of the Americans who were always claiming our planes were the fastest in the world. Our B-17's were three hundred mile an hour bombers. Our fighters were the best – this, that and the other thing. They called it Yankee BS. In a way, we were ourselves embarrassed about what was claimed.

On December 7th, they began to hold what they called a Haka. In New Zealand, it's a dance where they dance around and say this that. We'll show them. That's what the Yankees deserved.(unclear) all the time

Lewis, his first name I have forgotten for the moment, anyway he says "Fellas, you don't really mean that do you? We all have to get together on that" They said "Like hell, we do" and we had a fight. I can remember I got hit. I got these teeth broken a bit (points to teeth). I also had a big whopper of a bruise on the top of my head. I can remember having a table leg and trying to beat them.

That isn't very good to put in there. It's a story that maybe you better leave that one out. It doesn't create a nice impression.

Q: We get similar stories.

A: Let's see where will we go now?

Q: So, you didn't have any combat duty with the Canadian Air Force? You were a flight instructor.

A: I was a flight instructor only and put over 2000 hours in up there but that included all these different type of aircraft that I was telling you about.

Q: Did you ever fly in Hurricanes or Spitfires?

A: That's another story. Yes. The Canadian Car and Foundry assembled Hurricanes at where I was then- Fort William. I took the fellows out one time flying on a weekend flying. One of the mechanics there, I think. He may have been a pilot but I think he was a chief mechanic but he was the only one who was in at the station at the time. I took him up and taught him to fly the Tiger Moth. He said "I'm the only one there. You want to try to fly the Hurricane?" I said "Yes". So, I did. I just went up went around came in and landed.

That was the only time I ever flew a Hurricane. There wasn't much to it. It wasn't particularly a performance plane. It was performance to me because at that time, I hadn't flown anything as fast as that.

Q: So you decided in 1944 after you left the Canadian Air Force to join the American Air Corps?

A: Yes. I was given a chance also in 1941 when I was at Fort William. We went out to Manitoba and they said that they'd transfer us and a great many of us offered the chance to transfer to the American Air Force.

Jack Kelly and I and a fellow named Schroeder I think was with us then. I am not positive. Anyway, Jack Kelly was with me and we were offered a chance to go down to Randolph Field to instruct pilots at Randolph Field.

That didn't sound too good to us. We felt we wanted to get into combat by then. Jack and I, after they offered us this chance to transfer and, I guess, everybody there thought we would do it. Why we both said no. We'll just continue on with the Canadian Air Force. We'll have a better chance here.

That was very interesting. As soon as we had done that, they said we're acceptable. People came to us and said "Look we'll give you a \$1000 to transfer to fly Lockheeds across the ocean." This by way of Greenland, I suppose to ferry aircraft across the ocean. That was it. Maybe it was PBM's, PBYs. \$1000 if you'll do it. We turned that down too but it would have been interesting to do.

Q: When you went into the United States Army Air Corps, could you compare the training and discipline between that and the Canadian Air Corps?

A: The American Air Force was much stiffer, I think, in the training. Once you became pilots, you became much more reasonable (unclear) but we had none of that treatment that they had of having to stand at attention if you were junior and a senior officer came in. The discipline was completely different that way.

The Canadian Air Force was very very good. As a matter of fact, we had an instructor Sergeant Pilot at Dunville. We had a Sergeant Pilot at Dunville – a very good pilot who went to a night club in Ottawa with his wife. He's with his wife and this Sergeant Pilot and sees the fella that he had as a student. He says "Hello Bill, how are you" He says "When you address me, you will say 'sir' and stand at attention" Well, that Sergeant was very peeved. He got back and he offered his resignation saying that he just didn't feel that he had to take that.

To make a long story short, they called the officer up who had been stationed way out in Winnipeg no further out west in Vancouver that he was to come back at his own expense and he was to appear for proceedings. He appeared for proceedings.

They had him come in. He had to go. They had a case where they got him to apologize over the loud speakers to the Sergeant Pilot for the way he behaved. Everything was at his own expense and he would never do that again.

We had another one where they drummed out an enlisted man who was caught stealing. They just drummed him out and ripped off his things.

Q: When you went into the United States Air Force, did you have to do any other training or did they accept your background from the Canadian Air Force?

A: They accepted my background. Funny thing, the first time I landed, it was a fighter plane. No two seats. It wasn't at that time. It was on the old Type C. When I got in the P-51, I felt as home as if everything was exactly where it was supposed to be. The trim was right here forward and back. The trim is where you make a plane go up and down. Are you familiar with these terms?

The trim was right here for nose up or down. The rudder trim this way right there. Landing gear was right here where you could put it up. The throttle, of course, was right there where you could easily handle it with one hand in a very nice position. All of the instruments were exactly where you felt they should be. Engine controls. Minor controls, attitude controls speed, altitude and so forth.

So, my first landing on the P-51, I goosed it in and it was just absolutely perfect. It touched the wheels down, then...So, I came in.

One of the instructors said: "Baker, you'll have to do better landings. You better look into that." I thought that he's got me mixed up with someone else I'm sure that was right. So, I didn't do anything about it. But then the next time, we were taking up practicing instrument flying in T6's. They had T6's also on the base at Pinellas Air Force Base where I was stationed.

When I was going along, I thought it was boring as can be. I'm looking out –these two people – the instructor and the student just watching their instruments. The instructor looked around a bit but he couldn't be looking for other planes as much as the student could. I got tired. I was flying in formation with them. I was probably flying like this in formation with them. I decided I would enjoy myself I (unclear) like this and then skidding very greatly I dropped in where I belonged over on this side.

After I came down, up on the board was my name and five stars. I said "Gee, what's that? Somebody put stars on there for me." I went up and erased them. Nobody said anything. I thought nothing of it. Then the students, my other students, Bensen and Tupacic (sp?), came to me and said: "Gee, you erased those stars. You're supposed to be out with full pack going around the runway five times."

It so happened that David C. Jones, the Captain Operations Officer at the base – in other words he was in charge of all training. I think he got an idea that I was a good pilot probably from the first time I landed nicely. I'd done a good job as far as he was concerned. Maybe he said forget it. He then later became Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force later on which was the highest rank you could hold. He was a great fellow. He took lots of chances himself. I always thought he would get somewhere.

We were flying one day at Pinellas. We were going real low flying and a bunch of birds came up just as we're going through. They hit my wings so hard they dented the front part of the plane. I guess he blamed that on himself because I didn't get an admonition for that.

Q: How did you like the way the P-51 handled?

A: Wonderful. You felt as if you had been in it all of your life.

Q. You were sent out the Pacific Theater. When were you sent out to the Pacific Theater?

A: May, 1944.

Q: Were you sent out with a squadron or a unit?

A: Yes, although it was not all the same units. I was sent with Major Bray and he was a good friend of mine when we got to New Guinea. Up to that time, we had been more or less one unit. When we got to New Guinea, we were then reassigned to other units.

Q: When you went to the Pacific, did you fly out or did you go by....?

A: I flew. LB40 – that was a B-24 with a big large tall tail on it instead of B-24s that

had two fins on it. But the LB40's are going like this all the time in the air (makes circling gesture with hand). So, I flew over there and we every time we passed the equator, we changed from one time to another time. What more do you want?

(Question from guest: I am not sure of the date of I was born in November of '44 and he took a flight up from Florida by airplane to visit mom)

A: I don't think we want to get that in Martha. I don't think we want to get that in.

Q: When were you first in combat?

A: When I got to New Guinea which was May '44.

Q: What kind of combat missions did you fly?

A: We flew missions against Wewak, Wakde and Rabaul.

Q: Were you escorting bombers?

A: Yes. When you're escorting bombers, it isn't like you see in most movies. You go around and you fight the fighter and knock out the fighter. You don't do that because it leaves the rest of the bomb group unprotected because just you making one 360 degree turn in a case like that puts you so far back, you won't catch up to the bombers. So, all of these pictures that they show of all this combat is really off the beam.

Q: Describe how you would cover the bombers then.

A: If they came made a pass toward the bombers, they were more interested in the bombers than the fighters which is covered by diving at them and making one pass, period. That's it. You make a pass and then swing back into formation.

I'll tell you a case that happened in the Pacific over there. We were stationed at Nadzab and we would take off first and cover the other planes that were escorting the bombers such as the P-47 and we would land last because our fuel was so good and out speed was so good that we could take off first and land last. It was that good. It was pretty nice on the P-51. One thing we were doing, well that's another story.

I'll tell you a mission we took off from Schouten Islands. We had gone to Biak (unclear) the Netherlands airport. Biak is another one. We were taking a transport plane to bring us down there to bring back some new P-51s to Nadzab. It's so hot there. At noon, the natives sit down usually and don't do anything at noon time. It's so hot, the coolant on the P-51 if you have to wait long to take off your coolant would pop and you'd have to come in to get more coolant put it

This day, there were other planes taking off and we suffered from that so when we took off finally all of our planes were hot. We took off and climbed up. I got out maybe an hour out –something like that, less than that maybe. My coolant temperature went way up to the top.

I called the other leader on the flight and I said “I’ve got to land. My coolant is over the top” They said “There’s a field underneath us. I don’t see any action. Don’t know what it is.” Then I saw this little island off the coast which named (unclear). (unclear) was an island that was travelogued. You saw these beautiful palm trees and everything like that and it’s on a coral shelf and bright green water there and everything else. I saw that and I saw what looked like a jeep which probably was the US.

I went in and I landed there. After landing, it turned out my plane was ok. It was just an instrument problem, loose wire fixed pretty easily. Pikorski’s plane had actually blown its coolant so he had to land and we didn’t have anymore coolant over there for them to use. They telephoned or radioed Biak to send out some coolant. In the meantime, we went swimming in the coral reef there. It was beautiful. You can’t imagine how clear it was under that water. You saw tropical fish just like these. Just like these and you could see them all over.

But the big trouble is as you climbed out, you cut your hands on the coral. That gave you what they called the “New Guinea Crud” Every year all the skin peels off your fingers. Anyway, it was the most beautiful place

We found out that the airport that we were going to land on was a Japanese one. It would have been a mistake to land there.

Q: Did you fly the same plane all the time?

A: Not all the time because no plane is 100%. If the plane is damaged or if it had engine trouble, you couldn’t keep the same plane. We didn’t put the names on the planes. We didn’t do that until after the war because the fighter planes they didn’t have the maintenance personnel available to keep them ready them that fast. The bomber planes generally they were available more often. If a bomber was tied up because of engine overhaul, they could afford to let people have off until that bomber was ready.

Q: I noticed here that you thought tropical storms were a problem. How did they create a problem for you?

A: On Okinawa a couple of times, a couple the typhoons, it’s the same as a hurricane.

Q: How did you get to Okinawa? Did you fly across?

A: Yes. I went first from Johnson Island and landed but that was only a short stop on the way to the Philippines. I went from Johnson Island to the Philippines at Clark Field. Then from Philippines, I went to Okinawa. From Okinawa, I went up to Japan.

Q: What kind of missions did you fly while you were on Okinawa?

Let me stop here, I've got to change.

Q: OK. You were talking about going to Okinawa and what kind of missions you flew when you were in Okinawa.

A: They were all bomber escort.

Q: So, you arrived there after the battles and flew bomber escorts to Japan?

A: Yes, 650 miles up and the same back. You could come back two ways. Are you familiar with the shape of Japan?

Q: Yes

A: Then you know Kyushu, the bottom island, you could go out and through the gate there and go down the east side or you could go up and come in on the west side. Are you familiar with the way the war was arranged there?

Q: Yes, somewhat.

A: Alright, well I'll skip around now then and go into one of these missions.

We flew up from Okinawa Nadzab which is down on the southwestern tip of the island. We flew up about an hour out. We'd had a briefing the night before. We had arranged for somebody to wake us up at three o'clock in the morning to go out for the final briefing and the weather and so forth. We knew who was on the trip. We took off very early in the morning well before sun up. In fact, it was, I guess, five o'clock or something like that. We flew for an hour and one of the fellas had problems with his engine. That was probably Captain Weininger (sp?). When his engine quit- it was Lt. Weininger at that time he was the flight leader - it was his wingman that had the engine trouble- Captain Weininger's wingman had engine trouble.

So, we used different measures: leaning it out and using high manifold pressure cleans the lead off the plugs and you can sometimes clear it up. After we milled around twenty minutes trying to get him there because we felt we had to have four on the mission, Lt. Weininger called me and said - I was "tail end Charlie" you know the flight of four how they are - "Can you take the flight up, I am going to go back. Can you take it up there in time to meet the Catalina?" which was going to be flying about

1000 feet high over the inland sea there looking for downed airmen.

That's the worst job in the world. They fly out and patrol the inland sea in Japan and they rely on somebody coming to cover them. It's a Navy plane but the Air Corps was supposed to cover them.

We flew the 650 miles up there but when I got up near Nagasaki figuring I would take a short cut from Nagasaki into the inland sea cutting across the top of Kyushu which is a dangerous way to go because the (unclear) mountains there had peaks that went up. You could have a peak between your plane and another plane.

Anyway, there's only the two of us now (unclear). At Nagasaki, the sun turned a purple, a deep purple. I called in to come in tight and put on your wing lights and cabin lights and we'll watch (unclear) so I wouldn't have to use voice. But, there wasn't much chance of anything happening anyway. You could signal (he uses hand gestures) if you wanted to go into trail if you wanted to make a turn or something. In this case we had our wing lights and he came into a distance of maybe five hundred feet maybe. Normally, I would be out about fifteen hundred.

Anyway, I was worried about hitting these peaks He put on his wing lights and cabin lights and the sun turned purple – absolutely purple and then in disappeared entirely and it was absolutely as blackest deepest night as you could imagine. We were letting down at an airspeed probably around 260 miles an hour something like that. We still had our tip tanks on. I was lucky when I got out to the bottom the sunlight came through there (unclear) and hit the water in such a way that there was a little gleam on the water from the sunlight coming in that channel bouncing off the water.

It was still pitch black and (unclear) there was one little lamp light that hasn't been answered today what that lamp was out there. One lamp at the mouth of the Hiroshima harbor (unclear) which was lit. I turned into towards Hiroshima harbor calling the Catalina all the time in case his radio was better than mine. We couldn't locate the Cat. In any case, I turned around and making that turn you don't slow down fast in a P-51 and expect to be able to maneuver properly and have any speed left. I came down and went right over Hiroshima and it was pitch black except for a purplish glow. We just went around that channel once which has mountains in it there which, in itself is dangerous, and only made one turn around. The next time, I was further from Hiroshima and climbed out taking the eastern channel. I climbed (unclear) up at an air speed of about 240 miles per hour for at least twenty minutes before I began to see any sign of sunlight.

Then the sun came out and it was a beautiful day and we turned south and headed down the east coast of Kyushu and we were looking for targets of opportunity. I saw one airfield with a couple of battered planes on there but I didn't see anything else. There could have been something in the hangers I thought so I sprayed them and no

explosions or anything like that then returned back home to Okinawa.

I remember out there we couldn't have any navigation equipment. There's no way for them to locate us except but to call in to say you're heading this way or that way or so forth. You didn't have anything like you have today like a position locator or anything like that.

When I landed at Okinawa, it was before noon time so I wanted to get a bite to eat since we had been gone quite awhile.

Q: How long did it take to make a round trip to Japan from Okinawa?

A: Normally, it took 9 hours. When we landed, the Operations Officer said "How did the contact with the Cat go?" and Weininger got back with the other fellow I forgot his name. I said "We never made contact with the Cat" (He said) "Why not". I said "I don't know" He said "Go eat and I'll let you know what I find out about it."

So, I ate and went back and about two o'clock in the afternoon, the Operations Officer- oh, I went out in the dugout canoe we had made out of tent post and tent cloth a native dugout canoe. We had one P-51 pontoon offset and a double rudder arrangement on it because the reefs there were very very shallow and you didn't have much leeway for a keel or anything. So, we had to have that double rudder.

I was out with Cosman and the fellow from the next tent and I got a call. The Operations Officer was down and he called me "Lt. Baker, I found out what it was. It's the atomic bomb." I said "Well, that's good" That didn't mean anything to me. If that plane hadn't had its trouble with its engine, we'd have all arrived on time there right when the bomb actually hit not after the cloud formed with the big heavy fallout and all of us would have been polished off. If we had been late getting there, I don't know what would have happened.

Q: You have something here that you were hung by the neck on a meat hook.

A: Oh yes, that was flying out of Nadzab. The food was terrible at Nadzab. They gave you stuff they called Spam which wasn't Spam it was greasy stuff. You act like you know about that.

Q: I know about Spam.

A: Yeah. They gave you powdered milk and they give you this, that and the other thing. It wasn't very tasty. The Navy lived high on the hog. On the ships, they had very good food. We managed to bargain with the Navy. We paid something like eight Pounds British for a hunk of steak which we were going to eat from. It was hung on the side of the tent. The tent, we had wooden 2x6's for the planks and we had 2x4's

for railings around it for support like a regular temple.

Hanging from the upper 2x4, are you familiar with the kit that you get when you go out fishing? It's a pronged hook with three things. Somebody took the off the meet off the hook and the hook swung over just as I was jumping down from the tent to the ground. When that happened, why that hook got me right here (points to his neck under his chin) and it went right up along here and came out here. I have a little scar there and I have scars along here.

The hook was bent when it came out and it was really hanging. I had to pull myself up with my hand and pull it out, Giordano, who was in our tent, went with me down to the flight surgeon's office.

Actually, they didn't have doors. They had a place a tent like this and you come in. There's a table out here where they take information. Somebody is there. Since nobody was stopping him he got up on the table and he looked over the top and saw the doctor pulling this thing from my neck and stitching it. I think he passed out.

Q: How many missions did you fly?

A: I'm not sure because they didn't put in all our missions. I could tell because if you were at a base and go to another base you don't get them all in. But, I only flew fourteen missions or so.

Q: Did you every encounter any Zeros or other Japanese aircraft?

A: No, well we saw Japanese aircraft yes but we saw the Navy taking credit for downing a couple of Japanese aircraft. We heard them on the VHF radio. He said "I got one. Did you see that George?" He says "Yeah, you remember, I got one too Fred." There over there and there's nothing for miles around.

Q: You mentioned on your form that you had a mission to Shanghai. What was that?

A: Yes, the mission to Shanghai. That was one of the early missions. We had our squadron – it was a squadron mission – we had four flights of four aircraft each. The noses of our airplanes were yellow. The noses of the 40th Fighter Squadron were blue. For the 39th, they were red. That was the identification for it.

In the briefing before the flight which wasn't as early as early morning flight like the other flights, we'd been told that there would be a rendezvous point where we would meet and go back together as one group. If the strays were around, you go back with one or the others groups.

What happened was that we got over to Shanghai. I think I was probably the second

or third one. I don't know which. Anyway, there was a ship in the harbor there that I aimed at going down. As I aimed at it, I got into the prop wash of one of the other aircraft and it threw me way off. I couldn't bomb that time. I pulled up tight, pulled around and went down again.

This time, I let it go. (unclear) I got very low like this skimming and I climbed up. When I climbed up, the other planes had vanished. I didn't realize it that just how little time it takes for planes to get away. I climbed up and finally I saw another stray aircraft. I thought well I want to go back with him. I kept on going up and thought "Well, where is he going?" I got behind him and chased him for a long distance. I chased him until I saw that it wasn't the P-47 that I thought it was. It was a George-2 which had a Japanese (symbol). So, I gave him a parting shot but (unclear).

I left him and I went back to the rendezvous point. At the rendezvous point, what I thought were the 40th squadron. I went up to the leader and let him know that I'm going back as a trailer. He let me fly right in his wing as a third man. We kept on going and going and I had had an awful lot of training in navigation – direct DR (Dead Reckoning) navigation and I thought "Gee whiz. That can't be the 40th Fighter Squadron. It must be a squadron from Wake Island" He kept on flying and flying and finally I know doggone well that the way the wind sweeps on the water we were way north of course.

So, I just thought I'd say goodbye to them and I'd go into land or I'd be out of gasoline. So, I did. I went by and got back to where I was going to go into land. B'gosh, here comes a whole squadron in behind me. I let them land first and I landed after and found out that he was lost

Q: You were involved in the occupation of Japan. Can you talk about that a little bit?

A: You mean just flying?

Q: Well, you mentioned that you were in the Army of Occupation. Correct? Was your squadron based in Japan for awhile?

A: Flying experiences or..?

Q: Any of your experiences there as part of the Army of Occupation. I know you mentioned here about being able to ride one of the emperor's horses.

A: Oh yes. The Emperor. There's a place called Nikko, Japan. There's a place at Mount Asama (?). Nikko, that's where they put the upside down pillar in because they didn't want the gods to be angry with them for making something as good as they could make –the god's could make.

There's a Mount Asama up there. We went up there. This was with my wife and child. I had a jeep by then and our baby daughter who was one and a half years old. She probably can't remember it (refers to daughter in room) (chuckles)

(Daughter in background: "The jeeps were bumpy. I remember that.")

A: We went there and Mt. Asama blew its top the day after we were up there. We missed that.

Q: How long were you there in the Army of Occupation?

A: From September 1945 until February (?) 30th, 1948.

Q: What were some of your duties while you were there?

A: When I first got there, they were very short of help. They couldn't get help anywhere with everybody going home. They accumulated a lot of time – a lot more than I had. I didn't have very much combat time compared to the rest. I was made Security Officer. I was made Adjutant of the squadron. I was made Engineering Officer of the Squadron and I had some other duties assigned to me.

That wasn't because of my abilities it was purely because I got there at the wrong time. One of the things I did being the Operations Officer of the Squadron – the other squadron didn't have as many planes in good shape as the 41st Fighter Squadron had. The 41st Fighter Squadron had the most planes in use. So, they put me in charge of all of the flying. I was a 2nd Lt. at the time.

We had a mission where we were to fly in and try and make a pass at the heavy cruiser the USS Chicago. It was in Yokohama Harbor-Yokosuka really. We were to try and see if they could by using their radar and so forth determine if they could shoot us down or whether we would get away when we came in.

I sort of cheated. Instead of coming in from outside on the water side, I came in over the mountains and right down over the ship at a very low altitude (unclear) quite so low. When I pulled up, I went back to my base. We were asked if we could come back and attend a meeting on the success of the venture. So, Captain Weininger and I went down to Yokosuka. We were talking to them and this USS Chicago was out there.

There was a Commander Deering who was very knowledgeable and a very nice gentleman. He was talking to me and I said 'Is there any possibility of ever going out with you on a cruise or visiting the ship?' He said "We are going to make a cruise tomorrow morning." I said "What would I need to go with you?" He said "You would just have to have orders from your commanding officer that you were liaison officer aboard the USS Chicago."

I didn't drink too much but my Commanding Officer Weininger at that time; he had become Commanding Officer of the 41st Fighter Squadron. He drank an awful lot. When I took him back home back to the base he went to bed. I went in and I typed up orders to make myself the liaison officer with the USS Chicago.

That was a very interesting situation. I take his jeep and got a hold of the MP there and said "Look, Captain Weininger wants somebody to pick up his jeep down here. Can I trust you fellas to keep it for him?" "Yes, we can do that."

I reported to the USS Chicago. I didn't know which was fore and which was aft on the ship, of course, I saluted the wrong end. But he was very nice, Commander Deering. The first breakfast, I go in with the officers in the officer's mess and I go in and sit next to Commander Deering and I talked to him. He tells me this, that and that I was invited up to flag plot so I could see all the radar work and everything else –it was beautiful thing.

He was very nice and I'm very interested. The only problem was that I had come without packing a bag. I didn't have anything but the clothes that I was wearing. I guess I had – I don't think I had a darn thing else beside. I didn't even have a tie.

I was bunked with the flight crew. They had a seaplane that would be catapulted off but it would be picked up by this neck that was behind the ship and be pulled up into the ship. I slept with those officers. They were good. They loaned me a tie so I would have a tie there. The first meal, I was talking to them then I would talk and another fellow who began talking to me at the next meal. I thought it was funny. He didn't know me, He talked to me and I talked to him. Finally, I got down to one of the junior officers there and he says "What is your date of rank Lieutenant? I guess that you sit here."

We got down to Hiroshima which I mentioned I had visited before and was to be an inland cruise of the Hiroshima area. We went in through the north gate there. We visited the place at Hiroshima they had these Japanese midget submarines. We visited where they had the small destroyers. They aren't small. The destroyers were big but between each – what do you call it- the cabin space. Anyway, between each one of those you had to duck down deep practically crawl through because the Japanese were so much shorter than the Americans. You could bump your head very easily in there. After Hiroshima and Kure. As I said before practically the same thing. Kure is at the mouth of the harbor.

They were going to be there for a week. They planned on it being a regular cruise. When we got into town, we found it very hard to find a place to get anything to drink. We looked here and there and everything. I think we found that we could get a little bit of beer. I don't know. We didn't do very well on that. What happened is I said "How

long are we going to be here?" "We'd be here a week." I said "Can't we take any liquor ashore?" There was nothing else to drink. They said – the two fellows that I was bunked with these two pilots – said no you can't do that here.

So, I went down to ship's store and said is there any way that an officer can take anything that I could take to drink ashore. He said, Well, I don't know sir." And he looks it up. "Oh yes, sir. You're entitled to take one case of beer ashore. An officer is allowed to take one case of beer ashore." So, naturally, the next day I am with the same pilots again. We took the case of beer ashore and had a good time – a real good time. The next day there were probably ten people who took cases of beer ashore. The next day there were a whole bunch of people lined up to take a case of beer ashore.

When we got back there was a meeting which I wasn't invited to. I was told that wasn't the way the navy.....(unclear) they took me back to get rid of me early (unclear) back to Japan.

Q: When did you get back to the United States?

A: I came back on February 29th. Yes. I came back to the United States by ship '48. February '48.

Q: Were you discharged around that time then?

A: No, I stayed in. but anyway, on the ship back we hit typhoons. It was so bad. A ship that would normally take about five days, took ten days to go back. I had come back by ship. My son came back. My son was born in Japan. It says on his (unclear) "Made in Japan" but anyway he had a cataract in his eye which required immediate attention. He was sent back with his mother in February. No wait a minute; it was December of '47. He went back then.

I stayed in the military service during Korea and flying. I was in flying duty and during part of Vietnam. I was still on flying status but I didn't see any action.

Q: Did you see any action in Korea?

A: No. I was on flying status but I was in Washington working for the Office of Aerospace Research doing work for them on writing books on all sorts of scientific and so forth.

Q: When did you finally leave the service?

A: It was the middle of Korea, I was finally discharged. I had about 26 years of service.

(Question from daughter: “I’m sorry. When did you get out of the reserves? I thought it was after Vietnam”)

A: No, it was during Vietnam. It was an interesting point. When I was writing this book about the Office of Aerospace Research – I was telling you about – it required me to work with the Navy Department. So, I went into this place one day. This fellow says to me “I know you.” He was with the Navy Department down in Washington. I said “Well, I don’t know.” He said “Were you at..” and he named different naval stations and so forth. I said “No, I’d never been based on a naval station.”

He said “Well, I know I know you”. I said “Well, I don’t know. The only time I was with the Navy I was just attached” He said “That’s right; you’re the guy who had the beer.” So, he got a hold of an SNJ which was a Navy plane and he and I went flying.

(From daughter: “Dad, you didn’t finish the story about how you did have an opportunity to see the horses of the Emperor”)

A: Yes. At Nikko. It’s true that the Emperor had a white horse. He had a lot of white horses. I had a picture of myself on it.

Q: How did you get a change to ride that?

A: I asked to. We were early in the occupation. The Japanese were very, you know, still very very polite to us and tried to accommodate us.

(Daughter: You also knew some generals that were important. Didn’t you?)

A: Well, yes

(Daughter: No, in the Japanese)

A: Oh. I knew the man who was the chief instructor of what’s the thing they break wood in?

Q: Karate?

A: Karate and also these swords.

Q: The Samurai swords?

A: Yes. That was very early in the occupation. I went up and what had happened was there had been an accident where we had dropped makeshift bombs on targets at a place near Kanazawa (??) Anyway, I’ll use Kanazawa for the moment as the place.

A lady had been injured. We were trying to make – to give her something to help her out. I met this fellow who was the chief of teaching both the use of the Samurai sword and the karate. He took a pipe – an ordinary black iron pipe. He took it and cut it, hit it and it didn't hurt the sword at all. He gave me the Samurai sword to try. I took and took a piece out of the Samurai sword that went half through the blade. That was the end of that one. That wasn't one of the best ones, I'm sure. Anyway, it's how you hit it that does it. He chopped wood with his hands.

By the way, when I was in Japan, there was a fellow who had been working around the camp up there before we got our permanent quarters. Our quarters were made of little rooms that we constructed ourselves.

The tatami mats had been pulled out because they were full of fleas. He helped to do some of this constructing. I saw him looking at my flight gear. I said "Do you know airplanes." He said "Oh yes, I know." He did have a few words of English. I didn't have much Japanese at that time. He said "Do you mind if I give you a gift?" I said "Well, I don't want a gift." He said "I brought in a gift for you. I think you would like this one." He had already brought it in. He had it in this big brown bag with bottles in it. He said "Do you like Saki?" I said "I think Saki has to be hot." He said "No, this is drunk cold. I think you would be interested in this." So I said "Ok. What do you have?" He said "Here's the Saki". I said "Saki's to drink, isn't it?" He said "Yes, it is" I said "How did you come to get this."

It turned out he was the chief pilot on one of these great big Japanese Nakashima Flying Boats which were faster than US ones and cruise longer and everything else. He was picked to be a Kamikaze pilot. But on the day the war ended, he went in and swiped a couple of bottles of the Saki.

So then, we opened it up.....we'll drink it

(DVD quality issues cause interruption. Unable to complete last five minutes)