Oral History Interview

Austin Kiplinger

April 4, 2013

Interview with Austin Kiplinger

Interviewer: Jim Neuman. Historian, Navy Region Hawaii

Place: Commander Navy Region Hawaii, Flag Conference Room via telephone

Date: April 4, 2013

Note: Every attempt was made to transcribe Mr. Kiplinger's thoughts to paper with exactly the same tone and sense as he relayed them. Laughter is indicated with the symbol {LG}. "…" is used to indicate an incomplete thought, a long pause in a sentence or an instance where a statement is interrupted.

JN: Interview with Austin Kiplinger on April 4, 2013. First question June 21, 1943 Composite Squadron Sixty-Six is commissioned at the United States Naval Air Station, Sand Point, Seattle, Washington.

AK: Yes

JN: First of all describe your background in aviation and your decision to become a Navy pilot.

AK: I grew up in the 1920s and the 1930s and I idolized pilots. When Lindberg flew the Atlantic in 1927 I memorized everything about his plane the *Spirit of St. Louis* I knew the dimensions, I knew the wing spread, I knew the fuselage length, I knew that it was made by Ryan…{LG}…All those things. My room was decorated with aviation symbols and model planes, things like that. It was kind of a natural thing in those years. I think I was one of millions of boys who did that. And then it turned out by happenstance that my first flight in an airplane, a sightseeing flight over Washington, was piloted by a rather well known pilot named Bernt Balchen who had piloted Richard E. Byrd over the South Pole, he had been his professional pilot in that flight. So one thing led to another so it was always in my mind that I would love to fly but I didn't think I would ever get the chance to. Then in the summer of '41 I was working as an editor in Washington and I was coming up on twenty-three at the time and I ran into an old school mate of mine named Louis Gordon who had become a naval aviator and then opted to go into the Marines and was then flying F4Us and we had a beer or two together. I think maybe that's when I decided that when the time came, and we knew it was coming by this time of course the war had already started in Europe, that I would opt for aviation.

JN: How did you come about flying torpedo bombers?

AK: Well that was at the choice of the United States Navy. We didn't select our type. We all wrote down what we would ask for and everybody asked for fighters. That

was just the natural thing everybody wanted to be a fighter pilot and your got assigned to one type of the other and I don't know exactly how they selected them.

JN: Ok.

AK: So this was done after the elimination base, or the basic training which I had here in Washington at the Anacostia Naval Air Station.

JN: Please describe your training experience at Ft. Lauderdale.

AK: Well by the time we got to Ft. Lauderdale, you have to remember, we had been through basic training, we had been through Pensacola, we had a very short stay at the Naval Air Station in Miami Master Field, which I guess now is probably a housing development or something, but we had flown all the old airplanes. Somewhere in your notes you asked if we flew combat aircraft during training, the answer is no we couldn't afford it, the Navy needed them at sea. We were flying all the old crates that had been around for years and some of them really weren't in very good shape. We conked out quite a few of them and dropped them into Pensacola Bay. F2Fs, by this time the Navy was using F4Fs, but we had F2Fs they were bi-planes I remember them. We had the SB2C; we had the OS2U that was an observation scout plane that had been built as a float plane but they took off the floats and put wheels on them and we flew them. We flew mainly SNJs which was the Navy version of the AT6, the Army called it an AT6 it was a North American trainer plane and a very good plane it was a single wing. We flew the…Let's see what did we call it? The "Yellow Peril", that was a Navy trainer plane that was a bi-plane. All of these were either old planes or specifically training planes and then we had not only the SNJs but the SNV, the "Vultee Vibrator"…{LG}…This is all a matter of the record but the fact of the matter is we did not fly service type planes those were already at sea.

JN: Talk about the different aircraft that you flew, you talked about in training, but now in actual combat situations what kind of aircraft did you fly and what are your recollections of those aircraft?

AK: Well I was a torpedo pilot, a VT pilot and we flew TBFs and TBMs for the entire war in combat. You know the TBF was not a torpedo bomber, it was designed to be and it could be, we were trained to use it that way but nobody in my squadron ever used it as a torpedo plane, we didn't drop a torpedo in the entire war. We dropped four 500-pound bombs; we had forward firing 50-calibre machine guns, one in each wing and we occasionally carried forward firing rockets and we had a small turret with a 50-calibre behind the pilot that was a revolving ball-turret. The radioman had a 30-calibre stinger, I don't think it did any damage but it was there anyway, so we

were subsequently what was called an attack plane, the “A” so-and-so. Well the TBF was sort of the “A” so-and-so of its era it was an all purpose plane.

JN: And how was it? How did it handle? What do you recall?

AK: Oh it was one of the stablest pieces of aircraft that was ever made. Grumman was a very good aircraft designer and everything that came out of Grumman was sturdy and solid and maneuverable and dependable, and I didn’t get paid for a testimonial.

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}…Seriously General Motors started making the TBF and we called it a TBM. It was identical to what Grumman had made it was just turned out by a different factory that’s all. There was not an ounce of difference I don’t think any of us could tell the difference in flying it.

JN: When the squadron sixty-six is commissioned at the Naval Air Station in Seattle that was, as I said, June 21 of 1943.

AK: Right.

JN: Was there some kind of commissioning ceremony, or exercise of any kind?

AK: No, no, no…We just arrived and signed in and we were in a squadron. I don’t know how those things were done, they were done on paper. No, wartime dispensed with a lot of ceremony, we didn’t have a lot of ceremony. You were there to do a job and you arrived and you signed in and you proceeded to do it…{LG}…And that’s just the way things went. Now let me tell you something else interesting, when we arrived at Sand Point, we were members of what was called a “cashew unit” C…A…S…U…Carrier Aircraft Service Unit which had all of the enlisted personnel who were necessary aboard a ship, so we were the entire air group and support system of a small carrier. So VC-66 was the pilot, flying part of that, but we had all of the engineering and the ordnance and service enlisted units along with us, so we were a complete unit ready to go aboard a small carrier and we were trained that way.

JN: As a unit.

AK: Yes.

JN: Can you tell me about your crew?

AK: I had Swenson and Fernandez. Joe and he had no middle name so you know the Navy always said if you had no middle name they put “none”.

JN: {LG}

AK: So he was Joe "none" Fernandez…{LG}…A small corny joke. And "Swede", I've forgotten what "Swede's" or Swenson's first name was, but he was "Swede".

JN: It was D.R. That's the initials that I have here.

AK: Yeah. I don't think I ever knew what his name was…{LG}

JN: {LG}

AK: He was "Swede" and my gunner was "Joe".

JN: What do you recall of those Sailors?

AK: Well you know, we didn't socialize, we worked together in the air and that was it. And we were very friendly with each other and we all knew our job but we didn't know much about each other. I didn't know anything about Swenson's family or Joe's family.

JN: Now was that just because of an officer-enlisted relationship? Or was that…?

AK: No It was just…Yes it was officer-enlisted relationship plus the fact that we lived in different quarters. And we didn't socialize and we didn't have meals together and we didn't see each other except at the plane.

JN: Except when you were working.

AK: Exactly. I almost seldom saw them out of the cockpit, or out of his turret, or out of the bomb bay; almost seldom saw them out of the plane.

JN: Now can you describe what…I mean you're the pilot of this aircraft so in essence you have these gentlemen's lives in your hands; did that ever cross your mind, or was it just…?

AK: Oh it was not an issue; you never even thought about it; you were in command; you were an officer. At the beginning of the war you had to have had four years of college training, you had to have had a degree and you had to pass all those requirements. Now very shortly thereafter they began to limit those a little, I mean to flex them. We had a few men I know in training who had busted out of the Naval Academy so they hadn't quite finished. Then as the war went on I understood; now I didn't know about this personally from my own experience, but I understood they began taking people out of junior college for example after a couple of years of college because they had to go on as officers in the United States Navy, presumably they had to have all the training and background that any other officer

would have. And then toward the end of the war of course they were taking younger men out of prep school and high school because George H. W. Bush went in directly out of prep school. He was the youngest naval aviator. There was some contest; somebody said they beat him by two hours…But…

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}…I don't know. Necessity required that they flex those rules. The Army Air Corps was enlisting people hand over fist and they were training them faster and they were sending them over into combat in Europe within twelve months and of course our training took two years almost.

JN: What are your recollections of the Naval Air Station in Seattle?

AK: Well they are very vivid, but I don't know that they are of any great significance. It was right on Sand Point which is right on Lake Washington and it was right down below the University of Washington and that was a great advantage to us young unmarried naval aviators. I found a very charming girl and formed a very nice relationship and then we got shipped out and I never saw her again…{LG}…But it was right alongside of the lake and I understand that it has been turned into a park now. I understand there is nothing left there of the airstrip or the quarters and that sort of thing. We took off right over Lake Washington and we had mountains to the east a few miles, well I guess thirty-five or forty miles. We had Mount St. Helens, Mt. Hood and Mt. Rainer to the south and to the southeast. They were very good quarters, as a matter of fact the officer's club there was kind of a focal point for pilots from other areas. They used to come down from Alaska and hang out at Sand Point as long as they could because it was so much nicer than their quarters up in Alaska. Listen there is a story about a commodore, it's been written but you might be interested in it, Commodore Lesley Gehres. He was a commodore, he had come in as an enlisted pilot and gotten his wings and been made a regular officer in the Navy. And he rose to the rank of commodore which is just above captain and just below admiral, we don't use it anymore. He was commanding Officer of Fleet Air Wing Six in Alaska as commodore. He used to fly down from Alaska and hang out a few days at Sand Point because it was so much nicer than up there in Alaska. The significance of it is that later he was offered command of the carrier *Franklin*. It meant a demotion quote, un-quote. He had to step down and become a captain rather than commodore. He wanted command of a carrier and he stepped down and he was Captain when the *Franklin* was just…almost incinerated by Japanese dive bombers…

JN: Kamikazes?

AK: Kamikazes. And it almost burned up and he remained aboard true to the old tradition of the Captain is the last person to leave and he stayed aboard and he got the Franklin back to land, it was towed back it had no power, and subsequently they didn't restore it they decided it had to be scrapped. But he stayed with his ship and I remember him from his days as Commodore, Fleet Air Wing Six.

JN: Flying down from Alaska?

AK: Flying down from Alaska…yep.

JN: Wow.

AK: Well that's enough of that.

JN: This is great stuff, now August 23 the squadron moved to Shelton, Washington. What do you recall of Shelton?

AK: Oh well, Shelton was out in the lumber country and it was a small airfield and it was quite literally in the middle of the trees, I mean these were tall…Let's see what kind of pines do they have out there?

JN: Was it the fir trees?

AK: Fir trees…yeah…we were totally surrounded by fir trees. Shelton was a tiny little town. I'm told today that it is almost a bedroom community for the capital…And I have not been back, but we were on the Olympic Peninsula which had some very tall mountains. One little story, which is not particularly significant, the State Police called our skipper and said "we've got an escaped convict out in the mountains of the Olympic Peninsula and would you dispatch one or two of your aircraft and comb the roads and spot somebody up in the mountains and let us get a bead on him?" Well we should not have sent TBFs because they are not the most maneuverable airplane to fly up a narrow valley in the Olympic Mountains. But I was dispatched and I was flying up one of these valleys, ya know peering down trying to spot anything I could see that was suspicious. Suddenly I realized that the valley was rising faster than I could climb…And that presented a problem…There was only one way out and that was to make the tightest turn that was ever made by that aircraft I think…I put wheels and flaps down and I gave it full throttle and I put it in low pitch and I just screamed and I made the tightest turn and we shuttered…We were right on the verge of stalling. When I managed to get it around and then get downhill again…And I had somebody in the turret, he was a non-pilot, just along as an observer. And I noticed that he was very quiet, and I found out later that he was so paralyzed that he couldn't even talk because he thought we were gonna crash and so did I.

JN: {LG}…Wow.

AK: That was just one of those near misses…Close calls that you have and you forget about them after it's over with.

JN: So you're talking about a matter of feet?

AK: I beg your pardon?

JN: You're talking about a matter of feet between you and crashing?

AK: Yes, well yeah we were right over the trees by that time.

JN: Wow.

AK: But we managed to squeak around and regain airspeed and by the time we got around I could regain airspeed, raise the flaps, raise the wheels and go on home.

JN: Wow.

AK: But we lived there, I don't know how long we were there, we went from there down into the valley of Southern California.

JN: Just quickly on Shelton…There is a reference here to the daily flight schedule including "*dummy gunnery runs up and down the Hood Canal*…"

AK: Oh yes the Hood Canal.

JN: "*Firing runs over the ocean…Over-water navigation flights, bombing on the Dungeness target in Puget Sound"* I mean could you describe some of these things that you did?

AK: You know…They are not very vivid, let me think what was significant about it. What was significant about flying over Puget Sound was fog, we had a lot of it, and you were never quite sure when you would encounter it. It was very strange because it came up…Well it didn't come up it was there but we would fly into it and suddenly we would be without any visibility at all. I think I wrote something about that in the book. I was flying with a wing-man; in fact he was an old, old friend of mine Bob Weaver. And we just…All of a sudden we were in the thick of fog and we had no visibility and when you're flying formation that's awfully dangerous. So I radioed him to peel off to the left and I would maintain a steady course and I would climb and he would stay at low altitude, but reverse course a hundred-eighty degrees and that would take him out of it. I couldn't do that because if I reversed course we might be on a collision course. So I went straight ahead and climbed and he made his hundred-eighty degree, got out of the fog and went home. Well meanwhile I

was out there in the fog climbing and climbing and climbing and climbing and the damn thing went up to ten-thousand feet. And I finally broke out in sunshine and I could see Mt. Rainer and Mt. St. Helen and all these beautiful points of reference but I still had to get back down again…{LG}…

JN: Yeah right.

AK: So I gradually let down a little at a time and you couldn't be absolutely sure you're altimeter was precise and when I got down below a thousand feet I began to get nervous; there might be a bridge, there might be a rise in the mountain or my altimeter might be off. But I did finally break out at something like three-hundred or four-hundred feet and got home alright, but that was the kind of thing you encountered all the time.

JN: I know in your book you mentioned the fog and being, I don't remember your exact words but, Ideal conditions for training. Did this kind of training in the fog and these kinds of things that you had to encounter…Did that help at all during the war, did these kinds of things…?

AK: I don't think it did particularly but we didn't have fog out in the Pacific we never encountered it. It kind of kept you on the alert I guess, I can only theorize in retrospect. It made you more alert to the possibilities of different conditions. But in the Pacific there was no such thing as fog...{LG}...And we were not expert instrument pilots. I got an instrument rating and I was qualified to fly under instruments after the war but I never used it. We were trained to fly under instrument conditions, now the fact of the matter is right toward the end of the war the Navy began to do night flying and that's where this would all start to come in handy.

JN: Oh I see.

AK: Butch O'Hare, who lost his life in a mysterious crash, was engaged in a night flight which had TBFs in it and Japanese Zeros and I think F6Fs, he was flying an F6. And he was shot down. Whether he was shot down by a Japanese aircraft or by one of our own nobody has ever known. I think there is a fair suspicion that he was probably caught in cross-fire and it may have been with some of our own.

JN: The notes that I have hear mention also "*bounce drill was conducted at Moon Island".* Can you explain what a "bounce drill" is?

AK: Bounce drill is just landing signal…I mean…They are imaginary aircraft carrier landings. You just make the pattern and land on the deck or on the ground as though you were landing on an aircraft carrier.

JN: Okay. Are you taking off again right away?

AK: Yes. And In that particular case it was not realistic because when you landed aboard an aircraft carrier you didn't take off right away.

JN: Right.

AK: They do now, but in our day you didn't. No we just went around and around and around so that you could almost do it in your sleep and at four or five-hundred feet off the deck and then as you came up the "groove" you would go lower and lower and get down to maybe forty or fifty-feet and then you would "take the cut". We did not have a wire, it was just to simulate a carrier landing and then you would pour on the juice and go around again.

JN: Okay. Now on September 14 you moved to Whidbey Island to practice dropping torpedoes. You mentioned that you never fired a torpedo during the war but could you describe this practice.

AK: Well yes…We were supposed to fly down to the appointed altitude, and I'm trying to remember what it was. It was something like two-hundred feet off the deck and flying absolutely straight and level and then drop your torpedo and we did drop dummy torpedoes. It was important that you be steady, if you were "cocked up" a little too much and your torpedo landed flat and slapped the water it would probably knock out all the gyroscopic guidance systems and the torpedo would go crazy. If you dropped it too steep and it dove into the water at too steep an angle it would go down and then it would "porpoise", it would start going up and down and up and down and off course that was not desirable either. So you did not want to drop it too steep into the water and you did not want to drop it too flat and have it slap and have the gyroscopic guidance system disturbed. So you had to be absolutely level and have it enter at just the right angle and that was the trick.

JN: So on the twenty-first Ensign Ben Davis was killed

AK: Yeah.

JN: What are your recollections of that?

AK: I was on that flight and it was a devastating loss. He was a close personal friend of mine and he was flying nothing but a little cub aircraft and that was his undoing you know, he'd been flying torpedo bombers and that has a heavy feel. And of course a cub was just like a leaf and it didn't have any feel and he just got careless and let his speed drop and he spun in.

JN: Oh my goodness. So was he flying too low?

AK: No, no he just spun in. He was spotting…Ya know when you lose airspeed and you go in to a spin and you hit the water…That's it. It doesn't matter whether you're at high altitude or low altitude. As a matter of fact he was probably at a fairly low altitude because he couldn't pull out. He didn't have enough altitude to regain airspeed.

JN: Can you describe your feelings and the feelings of the squadron? This was the first loss is that correct?

AK: It was the first loss that we had there. But we'd all had losses in training in Pensacola. It was not the first time. I'd lost a friend named Fielding Mercer down in Pensacola and everybody had somebody in his training unit spin in. I think Ben was the first…His was the first in our squadron and not the last by any means.

JN: You'd mentioned in our pre-interview when I asked you about combat you said that "*combat wasn't the thing you were worried about it was just doing your job everyday*". I guess the dangers that are inherent with flying.

AK: Well that was true. Of course there's the added risk of being shot at and I can't say that it was "just the same". I'm probably exaggerating a little to say "it was just the same". Every flight off the deck was a challenge and you didn't know if you were going out on a long search and it was uneventful…It was just like a training flight but you never knew whether it was going to be uneventful that's the point. There was always the prospect of enemy action or engine failure and if you were eighty miles from the fleet and your engine goes out, well…that's that…{LG}…

JN: Right…

AK: That's the end of it.

JN: In September Andy McNeeland made a water landing. Could you describe water landings? How did it occur, and what kind of training were you provided for something like that?

AK: Nothing in particular. Just voice training you know? Let it down as gently as you can and keep flying speed. If you lost an engine the procedure was to "shove your nose over" and don't lose flying speed and as you get closer and closer to the water just kind of ease it on. Do you remember this fellow named Sullenberger who brought the US Air plane down the middle of the Hudson?

JN: Yeah…Sure…Absolutely.

AK: Remember that?

JN: Yes.

AK: Well he did it right.

JN: {LG}…Apparently so.

AK: {LG}…He was an old pilot and he did it exactly right. He put the nose down and he kept airspeed and as he got closer to the water he eased back and he just kind of "greased it on". And that's what we were taught to do. We didn't practice it.

JN: Yea I guess that's not something you can really simulate.

AK: No you don't want to risk it. That's adding another challenge and we had enough of them…{LG}…

JN: So that's not something you ever had to do?

AK: No, no I did not. As a matter of fact people used to say "Oh did you ever use your parachute? Did they test you? Did you get training?" We said "Hell no!" You did not want training in parachute jumping. If you ever had to use it we would use it. And that was that. It was dangerous because you might get hit by the tail of your own plane. And people have been dispatched that way. No it was not a part of our training; it was instruction but that was all.

JN: Right I understand.

AK: As a matter of fact we lost one young pilot who forgot to buckle his harness to his parachute. We sat on our parachute. You hooked it on to your harness and you waddled out to your plane and you climbed up on the wing and you got into the cockpit and then you unhitched the two buckles which buckled your parachute to your harness. Because if you got into the water on takeoff you didn't want all that heavy stuff to way you down. So after you got off the deck and sufficiently, safely in the air you were supposed to re-hitch your harness to your parachute. Well this fellow, young Degenkolb was young and forgot to re-hitch it and was involved in a high altitude crash and he thought he had his parachute so he bailed out and of course he didn't have his parachute.

JN: Yeah…Wow.

AK: He hit the water and I had to go and identify the body. And I'll tell you a body hitting the water from any altitude is flat…it's like a board. I won't go into that.

JN: In October of 43' you moved onto Holtville. What I have here is that there were three squadrons for night flying.

AK: Yes that's right.

JN: What do you recall of Holtville and could you describe night flying training?

AK: Well Holtville was…How would we say it now? We would say it was the pits.

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}…There must be some other expression that is equally descriptive. But it was nothing. It was way out in the desert and I mean desert. Ya know that's a very high, expensive resort area now, Southern California and the desert of the Coachella Valley desert south of Palm Springs and Palm Desert. Oh that's very high and expensive territory. But in those days it was absolutely sand and whatever grows in sand. And it was no fun and we couldn't fly in the daytime because you couldn't touch the cowling of the plane. It was too hot. And we had to fly at night because you couldn't fly in the daytime in the desert. At night we would take long flights, sometimes we'd go down as far as Yuma, Arizona, almost to the Mexican border. We had only one crash as I remember it, a fellow named "Brownie", his engine conked out at high altitude and he bailed out and he was rescued and we went out searching for the plane the next day. I flew him around over the…Or no…Actually I guess we drove. And we found the place where the plane had hit the ground, but it went down so deep in the ground that it was absolutely buried we didn't find any evidence of it.

JN: Wow is that right?

AK: It went straight on in. Not that we needed to know but he was kind of curious about it.

JN: Sure. Now on these flights are you just practicing navigation?

AK: Yeah and flying…Ya know I said earlier that we didn't use instrument flying? Well when we got to Holtville we had to because we're flying in the dark. I miss spoke. I would say now that we did fly on instruments in absolute darkness. And then we would come in on dead-reckoning and we would get back to the field and we would report in and we would get permission to land and we would land in total darkness and I'll tell you over the desert it really is dark.

JN: And I can imagine that, that kind of training was helpful when you got out to the fleet.

AK: Yes…I'm sure it was. I've never thought about it, I never tried to analyze it, but I'm sure that it was.

JN: And then about a month later you moved to Otay Mesa and I know you talked before about Otay Mesa.

AK: Yes…{LG}…We weren't there very long but as I told you it was ideal for takeoff because as soon as you got to the end of the runway you were already four-hundred feet above the ocean. This was right on the bluff of a mesa…Truly. And it was right on the edge of the mesa and so if you'd had engine failure of course you would have gone into the "drink". But it was a very good little airport and I am told that it's in the suburbs of San Diego and it's now a shopping center.

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}

JN: It would be interesting to go back wouldn't it?

AK: Yeah it would. If I go out there the next time I will try to remember to go look at it.

JN: I also have mentioned here catapult shots?

AK: Well yes that was our standard. We never did a "fly away" on a small ship we didn't have enough…

JN: Got'cha…On the escort carriers…

AK: I believe it was ninety feet long. I believe the catapult run was ninety feet. And we would get hooked up and put our head back against the headrest and when we were ready for takeoff we would put our arms across our chest horizontally. That meant we were ready for takeoff and he would "fire" and you'd be thrust forward at a pretty hard push. And you put your propeller at low pitch and full throttle and you put your arm across your chest and you were ready to "fire" and they would "fire" you. So you had your own momentum from the propeller plus the push from the hydraulic thruster. And we never had anybody go in the "drink". Oftentimes in low wind conditions you would sink as you went off the front of the ship. You'd go down toward the water and you would hope that you were gonna clear it and we always did.

JN: {LG}

AK: Fortunately.

JN: So at Otay Mesa are you being fired by these catapults?

AK: No I don't think we had any land tests of catapulting that was all aboard ship.

JN: Which ship were you training on at that time?

AK: Well we were trained on some many ships. Now let me see, I have to look at the…I've got it on my map up here. There were a whole series of em. The

Tripoli[1]…We were originally assigned to the *Tripoli*…I think I wrote down…Here we are. During training we did carrier landing training on the *Wolverine*[2] out on Lake Michigan. Oh…the *Manila Bay*[3], that was the one we were training on off Otay Mesa.

JN: Okay.

AK: And we were assigned temporarily to CVE-61. And then we were assigned to the *Tripoli*, which was CVE-64. And those orders were then changed, and we went to Pearl Harbor on the *White Plains*[4], which was CVE-66. We assumed that, that was gonna be our permanent assignment because it was sixty-six. And I think that was what we were intended to be, but when we got to Pearl Harbor we were detached from the *White Plains* and assigned to the *Nassau*[5] which was CVE-16. And we went into combat on the *Nassau*.

JN: Now I know that you mentioned in your book, and in our previous conversation that your original orders were to Alaska?

AK: Yes!

JN: And then the orders got changed to Pearl Harbor. Looking at the chronology here I see where it does mention that you were going to be going aboard the *White Plains.* Was that before you went aboard the *White Plains* that you were going to go to Alaska?

AK: Yes that's correct.

JN: And then your orders got changed to go on the *White Plains* to go to Pearl Harbor.

AK: That's correct. So far as I know the specific dates on these things I don't have in my mind but that's the rough chronology. Then I think it was after we got to Pearl Harbor that our orders were changed. I believe it was when we landed; we went ashore, we were at bachelor officer's quarters, we were detached from the ship and then we got orders to re-embark on the *Nassau*.

JN: So now sailing into Pearl Harbor on the fourth of January, 1944. What were your first thoughts about Pearl Harbor and maybe at this point in the interview, just kind of describe your recollections of Pearl Harbor and…We'll start with that.

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[1] *USS Tripoli* (CVE-64)
[2] *USS Wolverine* (IX-64)
[3] *USS Manila Bay* (CVE-61)
[4] *USS White Plains* (CVE-66)
[5] *USS Nassau* (CVE-16)

AK: Well it was a very…I must say…It's hard to describe but we were kind of in awe of Pearl Harbor. You know we had the same feelings, and impressions of it that everybody did. You know, this is where it had all happened. Of course, we sailed into Pearl Harbor up the narrow channel and I think we were all out on deck looking and we were awe struck. It's hard to describe. None of us had ever been to Hawaii before, at least not to my knowledge. Then to come up the channel where the American ships had sailed…Now the *Enterprise*[6]*,* you remember got out of the harbor and got to sea and avoided being damaged in that raid. And we were all aware of all of this as we came up the harbor. As we got close to Ford Island we could see the Arizona off in the distance, just a little bit of it poking out. And then we were aware that a lot of ships were sunk underneath us. We didn't know the names of them. I don't think I did at the time. But it was a very, unsettling feeling. And we tied up. And this was on the *White Plains*, and I guess we assumed we were going into action on the *White Plains; a*nd we went ashore and the place was "swarming" with people. Ford Island is not a very big place, well you know it…

JN: Right.

AK: …And there was a BOQ. There were a lot of BOQs around, I don't know how many and there were people there from everywhere. Not just pilots, but ship's officers…And…People coming and going…Waiting assignments and it was kind of a central point from which everything else was dispersed. And then we got orders, I think it was very soon after I don't remember the precise date but it was within two or three days, to suddenly go aboard the *Nassau*. And all of our non-flying officers were busier than we were. They had to get all of the planes from the *White Plains* to the *Nassau, a*nd get all of the enlisted personnel transferred, etcetera, etcetera. So I suspect they were working eighteen and twenty hours a day and we went aboard and sailed immediately. I think the answer is that we were attacking the Marshall Islands and it hadn't been predicted very far in advance, I don't know how far in advance that battle had been determined, but it came up pretty unexpectedly.

JN: It says on the sixth that you…"*The squadron landed for its first landings on the Nassau…After a long day of qualifications the ship returned to Ford Island.*" Could you describe these qualifications? What did you have to do?

AK: Well it was just taking your flight up and circling the ship and waiting for instructions to come back and land aboard. It was just tryouts, just get accustomed to the specifics of this particular ship. They were pretty much the same. They were not identical in dimensions but they were close enough so that one ship was pretty

[6] *USS Enterprise* (CV-6)

much like another. But nevertheless the Captain…Every Captain wanted to "tryout" his new squadron and see if they could do what he…{LG}…What he asked them to.

JN: Okay. Just as a break in the interview. I know that we have been going close to an hour now. Are you okay? Do you need?…

AK: Yeah I'm alright. I'm not doing very well, I'm…

JN: You're doing fine!...{LG}

AK: I'm not…{LG}…You know sometimes when you haven't been thinking about the specifics of these you have to have to kind of cudgel your brain a bit.

JN: No, no, no your doing great. I'm asking a whole lot of questions just because I…It's actually pretty unusual that I have this much information to talk about…

AK: Yes…I can understand that. You have to understand that I have made a profession of asking questions.

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}

JN: That's right so I don't have to tell you.

AK: Your turning the tables on me you know…This is unfair…{LG}

JN: That's great…

AK: Oh we were talking about water landings. McNeeland…I didn't really know McNeeland was landing until we brought him back aboard. A lot of times you didn't know what the hell was going on. Somebody on the ship did, but not everybody did. But I tell you Sam Takis, who was a fighter pilot, was shot down and he went into the uh…The Majuro…That was out in the Marshall Islands. He went into the middle of this…Um…The bay. And he didn't have his shoulder straps. We used to joke with him…He was wounded…His head hit the instrument panel and he suffered some…Some damage, and we used to tell him, "listen if you had, had your shoulder straps buckled the way you were supposed to you never would have gotten {garbled}…{LG}

JN: {LG}

AK: By the way Sam Takis is still living. He is one of the six remaining pilots. He lives somewhere down near Pensacola and he plays golf every day.

JN: Is that right? Six remaining…I was going to ask you about that. So there's six pilots remaining?

AK: Yeah six out of how ever many. We at one time would have about twenty-four or twenty-six pilots, but because of rotation, and losses and replacement I think we probably had a total of something like thirty-six.

JN: Do you know who the six are?

AK: Yes well let's see if I can tell you. One is Deloach Cope, whom you have had some contact with. One is Sam Takis who stayed in and became a captain. One we just lost is J.P. Fox, who remained in and became a captain. One is Bud Davis; now I don't know where he is, he's a civilian, he's gone back to civilian life. Now let's see Kiplinger, Cope, Takis…

JN: Davis.

AK: Davis. There are two more whom I can't remember right now.

JN: Okay well if you think of them I might try to contact them.

AK: You know Deloach Cope knows them all.

JN: Okay…{LG}…

AK: I recommend a check with Deloach. He's in contact…He calls us and he is our contact man.

JN: Okay.

AK: By all means, he knows exactly where they are and if something happens to one of us he lets everyone else know.

JN: Now by the way on that note…Of these different pilots…I know everybody had the nicknames. You were "Kip". How did they get these names?

AK: Oh I don't know! How do guys get names? Somebody starts calling them that and that's the way it is.

JN: So there's no?..There's no?..Kind of…

AK: There's no procedure…{LG}…No. Absolutely no procedure…{LG}. As a matter of fact I've said that our squadron was a group of individuals and somewhat undisciplined individuals we were not a click the heels and salute type of collection. We were...How would you say it?...Eclectic?...Is that the word you would use? We were really a very unusual bunch of…mixture. We had some from the south; we

had people from the east. We didn't have many from New England as I think we were talking about that the other day. I think most of them went to Quonset Point and got assigned to Atlantic duty, and those who went to Pensacola tended to be assigned to the Pacific duty. So I think that's why we didn't have more from New England. But we had em from Texas, we had em from Montana, we had em from California, we had em from Mississippi and we had Jim Mayo, he was from Mississippi but he was in graduate school in Washington when the war broke out and I was from Washington and so it was that kind of mixture. And all kinds of backgrounds and all kinds of cultural patterns and things like that. So we were kind of a ragtag bunch of guys.

JN: Now when you were moved to the *Nassau*, you were parked right in front of the *Utah*[7], or the wreck of the *Utah*…

AK: We were right over it…{LG}…It was down on the bottom of the channel.

JN: What do you recall of…?

AK: We didn't know that actually. We didn't know we were anchored over the Utah until they began blasting it. And that was the first I had realized what was down beneath us. They were apparently trying to turn it over and get ready to pull it up after we had gone to sea. And I think you told me that they never succeeded in that?

JN: Right, the *Utah* is a memorial now actually.

AK: Oh is that so?

JN: Yea the state of Utah built a memorial…a platform out to it in 1972.

AK: Oh is that so? Well that's where we were anchored. We were tied up right there.

JN: So one last thing before we actually get to war here, it mentions on the fifteenth through the eighteenth you participated in a joint exercise in Maui? What do you recall of that?

AK: Oh, yes well we were in Kahalui and as I remember it, it was a little after evening…Ah…Dinner. We got a GQ call and we all went to the ready room and we waited and waited and finally the skipper came and said, "Man your planes, be ready for takeoff and warm up." Well we didn't know what was going on. I guess we assumed that we were under attack, because there wouldn't have been any other reason to do that. We went out to the flight line and waddled up and got into our cockpits and cranked up and got the engines warmed up and we warmed and warmed and warmed and nothing…No instructions…And the engines were

[7] *USS Utah* (AG-16)

beginning to overheat so we cut them off. Then we waited and waited and waited and finally, I can't tell you how long it was, but we got instructions over the radio, in our earphones to "secure and return to the ready room." So we did and we were told, "Okay that's all, nothing more, go to sleep." We never did know what that was all about until after the war I read about the visit that Roosevelt had made to Nimitz…Mid ocean…And I compared the date and of course that coincided. So I can only surmise that the first…It was so secret that they hadn't even notified the duty officer at Pearl Harbor and he got some kind of radar contact and assumed it was unfriendly and called for an alert. Then I presume somebody set him straight and he canceled the alert. That's surmised but I think it's probably true.

JN: Now on the twenty-forth of January when the *Nassau* ships out, weighs anchor, there's a mention that the ComAirPac Band played "Aloha Oe"?

AK: Yes!...

JN: Was that a common practice? Did that…?

AK: Yes I think it was. I think that was what they did and it was very moving. Ya know it's strange what touches you but I think I remember that and it was kind of like you thought it was "goodbye" and maybe it was "goodbye forever." You didn't know; you were green at that particular point. And yes that was very…I'd forgotten that. But I remember it now and I remember it was very moving. Yes.

JN: So you did have those thoughts of…Maybe you won't be coming back?

AK: Well I think you had that feeling. It wasn't…You didn't consciously…Uh…Think of it but you had that kind of feeling.

JN: And so that event was kind of…Very poignant for you?

AK: As I think back on it, you remind me of it I think it was as a matter of fact…I hadn't…I hadn't even thought about it for all these years.

JN: Well I'm glad you gave me something…Something to ponder.

AK: Yes…Yes you poured something in.

JN: On the thirty-first you're actually…Is your D-Day…That you're supposed to be going into combat and that's at Majuro…

AK: Yes…

JN: Can you describe that?

AK: Well, we were way south of the big action at Kwajalein. And we were kind of protecting against the unexpected and the unexpected didn't happen. What I remember most was the beauty of the Majuro…Ah…What do we call it?...

JN: The atoll?

AK: The atoll. It was just breathtaking. The color of the water and the sky and the surf and these little dots of islands around the center; I guess it's what's left of a volcano of millions of years ago and it was just so glorious. All we did was…We knew that the Japanese had some "enforcements" their but it was not heavily enforced. And I think as think I mentioned we sank a few small barges and small boats but we encountered no opposition until we went to Wotje and Taroa, that's where the…That's where the action was.

JN: Yes, okay I'm glad you mentioned that. So that…On the seventh you struck Taroa and Wotje and I know you've mentioned this to me before and I know it's in your book, it's just interesting in the little history that I have here it's not very descriptive it just says, "Kip Kiplinger brought back an Avenger with a hit in the bomb bay and left wing." But I know that there was more to it than that, can you describe that?

AK: Yes it really was more to it than that and it turned out alright but it was one of those things that could have been a total disaster for the ship and everything around it. What happened was I…We did bombing…They called it glide bombing but it wasn't glide. We went into what we hoped was about a forty-five degree dive and that may not seem very steep but when you're looking straight down over the cowling of the aircraft forty-five degrees looks like it's straight up and down…{LG}…Dive bombing in the SBD's and the SB2Cs was even steeper; they went as closely as they could get to a vertical. Now you couldn't quite get to a vertical because the wings would keep you pushing out. But we were in a forty-five degree dive and it wasn't a glide because we had on full power. And we got down to…We were bombing the airfields so that they couldn't launch a protective device…Attack. And I pushed the…I was hit, I could feel that we were getting hit by something or other and I could feel the thud and I checked with Fernandez and Swenson and they had not been personally hit; they were okay, but I knew that we had suffered some damage. However I pushed the eject button on the stick to…I had opened the bomb-bays and I pressed the eject button for the bombs and we went on down and we completed the dive and I pulled up and I reported back to skipper, or I guess it was the "exec"…Uh…"Trap" that we'd been hit and I didn't know how much damage we had suffered. He said, "Can you still fly" and I said, "I think so" and as it turned out I could. And he said, "Alright return to the ship" and so I did and I didn't know that I'd suffered any particular damage but I was coming up the "groove" and I received a steady signal from the Landing Signal Officer and I received the "cut" and I landed

and I got a "good wire" and everything seemed normal except I noticed the ship was abandoned.

JN: {LG}

AK: Nobody was in sight and I think the thing that cut me most was that the LSO, the Landing Signal Officer had dived into the safety net.

JN: {LG}

AK: I thought, "That's an insulting thing to do!"…{LG}…And then this ordinance man popped his head over the…from the catwalk and was gesturing wildly for me to stay where I was and I still didn't know what was going on. I stayed. And he went under the plane and he was down there for maybe a minute or two and then he came out and he said, "Okay…Okay sir its okay now you can get out." And I said, "What do you mean its okay now?" And he said, "You're bombs". I said, "What do you mean my bombs. I dropped them?" And he says, "No you didn't. You're bomb bays didn't open." I had been hit in the hydraulic system and the bomb bays only half opened. So when I pushed the eject button, or the drop button and they dropped out of the holding racks into the bottom of the bomb bay. And they have a little propeller on the nose cone that arms them when they're falling and so they were arming themselves all the way as we were flying home. So now they were armed and ready to go off. And if I had, had a bad landing, or hit the barrier, they would have gone through forward against the fire wall and probably exploded three, or four, or five-hundred pound bombs would have blown the top off the ship. So that was the story that didn't happen. And that's why everybody took cover. They saw that at the last minute and everybody got the hell out of the way.

JN: So could they have radioed you to say that, that was the situation?

AK: Oh if they had known that I would have taken the plane up to ten-thousand feet and bailed out and let the plane go into the water.

JN: Okay.

AK: We all would…And my…I would've instructed my crew to do the same.

JN: Now the other thing I was going to ask you about…In your book you mentioned that in this incident when you were landing you felt heavier. You noticed the weight. I was just wondering when you would generally drop your bombs; wouldn't you notice a change in the weight of the aircraft?

AK: Well I guess you should except it was the first time I had ever done so.

JN: Oh I see…

AK: You know? So it was my first experience and I should have known yes, but you're excited and you're being fired at and you're attacking an enemy airfield and, you know, you don't know what to expect. I know it now. I can contemplate it nicely.

JN: {LG}…Right. It's…Hindsight is twenty-twenty.

AK: Exactly.

JN: Okay thank you that was a wonderful story. March 3 the *Nassau* arrives back at Pearl Harbor. Before I ask my next question though, I'm sure each ship is different as far as the crew and so forth, what are your recollections of the *Nassau*?

AK: Ya know we'd had very little contact with the ship officers and the ship crew. We were so much to ourselves, we went to our ready room and it was not the ship's ready room it was the Air Department's ready room. And we didn't really know very much about the ship. And I've…in subsequent years I've gotten materials from the *Nassau* when they have reunions, and I've never gone to one, one of the ship's reunions, and I really didn't have any contact with anybody aboard ship. It was not until later on, I think during the cruise with the *Fanshaw Bay*[8], toward the end of our deployment that I even had any contact with the Captain of the ship. That was kind of through an emergency, or a couple of emergencies, Captain Johnson[9] and the Admiral…Admiral "Ziggy" Sprague[10] and I think I wrote those up.

JN: Yes those are in your book.

AK: Yeah people used to say, "Did you know Admiral 'so-and-so'? Did you know Admiral Kincaid? Did you know Admiral Spruance? Did you know Admiral Halsey?" I said "---- if I knew any of those fellas I was in trouble."…{LG}…

JN: {LG}

AK: I subsequently came to know a lot of them here in Washington, the Chiefs of Naval Operations and Jim Holloway was a CNO here about fifteen years, twenty years ago is a good friend of mine now, but I didn't want to know any admirals…{LG}…

JN: That's great…Boy…You've got me laughing here…Definitely have to ask about this. When you ride back to Pearl Harbor on the *Nassau*, the squadron flew out to Barking Sands, and I know you've been to Barking Sands a few times, so maybe at this point in the interview if you can just talk about your recollections of Barking…Not just this time that you went, but in the couple of times that you went what do you recall of it?

[8] *USS Fanshaw Bay* (CVE-70)
[9] Captain Douglass Pollock Johnson
[10] Vice Admiral Clifton Albert Frederick, Commander Carrier Division 25

AK: Well, we had two deployments there; two stays. The first one was very brief between the *Nassau* and the *Altamaha*[11]. Then the one when we went out into the mid Pacific on anti-submarine duty. And that was only, as I remember it only over a week or ten days, because they got notice that something was going on out there and they pulled us down to Kaneohe Bay for a short refresher in anti-submarine and then put us aboard and sent us out. But it was idyllic. I mean it was as close to the Garden of Eden as anything I could imagine on earth. It was just magnificent and there were very few plantations I think only six or seven very big plantations and we knew Mr. Ramp whose daughter is Allegra Cope. And they were very hospitable to us, they had a…They're headquarters in their home was near Hanapepe, and Hanapepe was fairly close to Barking Sands as I remember it. And it was just an idyllic kind of existence, we were delighted to be there and when we got orders to leave almost immediately we were all disappointed…{LG}…The Waimea Canyon was just something beyond anybody's imagination; just glorious. And we'd get in a jeep, a bunch of us, and drive around the outskirts; ya know around the outside of the island up to the north that plantation, I've forgotten the name of it where they filmed South Pacific. And the roads were sand; there were no hard surface roads that I can remember, maybe there were a few, most of them were sand, and the plantations were sugar and pineapple and it was just like being in paradise for a while. And then we went out again. Well then when we came back we were there for a much longer period I guess it was two and a half months, before we went on the *Fanshaw Bay*. I haven't checked the dates but I think that's roughly…We had the second stay was again a very beautiful one.

JN: Yeah it was May 11…went back to Barking Sands and then I know it was broken up. But I think it was all the way to July or the end of June. What kind of things did you do on Kauai?

AK: Well, we went into the ocean as often as we could. We weren't surfers; ya know surfing hadn't become the popular sport that it subsequently did. And we just kind of hung around. We didn't have any night life. There was no social set and we just kind of…I guess we existed.

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}…I'm trying to think what we did do?

JN: It was obviously very relaxing.

AK: It sure as hell was! But I have to tell you we were getting a little impatient. You know when you're trained to do something and then you have to hang around on

[11] USS Altamaha (CVE-18)

the beach; it's disconcerting. It wasn't that we were blood thirsty or anything, but we were trained to get out there and do something and here we were being just sent off to…Put out to pasture as it were. We didn't really know what we were there for. But we certainly enjoyed the surroundings I must say.

JN: You'd touched on this before and I wanted to ask you so I'm glad you did. The first time you went to Kauai, you were later sent to Kaneohe as you mentioned for that anti-submarine refresher as you put it.

AK: Right.

JN: So here at the beginning of the interview you were mentioning how you didn't use torpedo…Well I guess it's not necessarily related…Ah…This anti-submarine patrol? So that was kind of unusual then for you to be going through this training for anti-submarine?

AK: No actually we were trained in anti-submarine tactics more than almost anything else.

JN: Okay.

AK: I think, and as a matter of fact when we were in Ft. Lauderdale I did anti-submarine patrols off the Atlantic coast. We didn't even mention that. But between Miami and California and Seattle I had an interval of four or six weeks at Ft. Lauderdale in training in the TBF, but also we were doing actual combat patrols off the Atlantic. And you know the Germans were very active, they were blowing up ships within sight of the beach. People in Florida used to see this happening. And so that was real live combat and I find it in my log here as combat action.

JN: Right. You mention it in your book too come to think of it.

AK: Yeah, and as a matter of fact by that time I had just gotten married and I had to get up about four o-clock in the morning to go out to the airfield and go out on these early morning patrols and some of the people who were retired and living in an apartment next to where we were living were complaining that we were making too much noise at too early in the morning. And my wife, bless her said, "Well now listen if you hadn't heard our noise out there you might have heard the German explosions of the {garbled}…

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}…A lot closer to the beach so really be grateful. This is the best of both worlds.

JN: That's great. So describe then after you're training at Kaneohe. You went aboard the *Altamaha* Is that correct?

AK: That's correct.

JN: And then describe that mission for us.

AK: Well as a matter of fact we got contact within the first twenty-four hours. Let me see now, there were two contacts…Cope…let me get it straight in my mind…

JN: It was Polski.

AK: Polski yeah.

JN: Edwards.

AK: Polski, Edwards.

JN: And then Fox.

AK: That's one torpedo plane and one FM; we were flying FMs at that point. Again TBMs and FMs were all made by General Motors, they were Grumman type planes but they were made by General Motors. And they were positioned and put…We were put right on the spot where the Japanese were intending to interrupt our supply lines to the Marshalls. And again something I didn't know until after the war, we had broken their code and we knew what they were up to. And one of those…I think the Polski group…Lets see was that Polski/Cope?

JN: It was Polski and Edwards.

AK: Oh Polski and Edwards.

JN: And then Fox and Dwight.

AK: Okay I think Polski and Edwards sank theirs and I think Fox and Dwight damaged theirs. So that was a successful mission. It didn't last very long, it wasn't very heroic and dramatic but it was very successful.

JN: So how would they…If you spotted one of these submarines…can you describe…?

AK: Yeah in both cases they spotted the submarines periscopes and what you looked for was kind of a little "feathery" line in the water…You would…A periscope would not make much…

JN: Wake?

AK: You couldn't see very well but you could this long line behind it. And that is, that's what we were taught, I never saw one so I can't tell you but obviously Polski and Edwards did. But what you did was to line up and at a forty-five degree angle and you had four five-hundred pound bombs and they were set to a depth charge…A certain depth below the surface.

JN: Oh I see okay.

AK: And you attacked from…You hoped to attack from the head on, or forty-five degrees so that you could straddle the course of the submarine. And that way you gave yourself the best chance of getting an explosion close enough to damage the target. And you know if you did it head on and you missed by a little bit, you'd miss by a lot. But if you did it at an angle, you had a better chance of getting it with one of the four. And you would drop before and then…As close as you could to the course of the submarine and hope that one of them would be close enough to do the damage.

JN: What were the rockets used for?

AK: Well if you ever caught anything on the surface. You could use then on land based targets as well, but most of the time those were in case we caught something on the surface; which we never did.

JN: How effective were those rockets?

AK: Well I don't know…{LG}…To tell you the truth.

JN: You never used them.

AK: Well we fired em' but I never had a Japanese target so I don't really know. I suspect they were pretty good if you got close. They were highly explosive of course and they had a big charge. So I think they were more than just a bullet. They covered an area of maybe, I don't know fifty or a hundred yards.

JN: Okay very good. Well if you have anything else on that mission…

AK: Well let me see. It was very successful, it only lasted a short time and we came back and went back to Kauai.

JN: Oh I know what I wanted to ask you. Here the last note I have…This is in June, it might be June 11, it says, "as a farewell to Barking Sands Brownie, Andy, Kip and Cookie paid ten dollars apiece to the Provost Marshall for illegally, unlawfully and without authority appearing on the public highway after the hour of curfew."

AK: Oh yeah! I don't know what…Uh…*Deponent saith not*!

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}…The prosecuting attorney is asking the question and I plead… I plead guilty, no, no I plead *nolo contendere*.

JN: {LG}…I've got to know what that's all about.

AK: Damned if I know. We were out late I guess. We must have been up to no good.

JN: Must be.

AK: I'm not gonna testify. I plead…Uh…What's my defense? I don't know. I'm not gonna talk.

JN: That's about a…I think that's about $130 in 2013 money. Alright let's move on.

AK: Okay let's see if I have any notes down here that I made that I was going to try to remember to just extemporarily…

JN: Sure.

AK: Let me see here; mid-Pacific; Fanshaw Bay; Halmahera. Oh, well our big action was on the *Fanshaw Bay* later.

JN: Well go ahead and start talking. We can talk about that.

AK: Well you know we sailed out of Hawaii and first of all we sailed down to the Solomons and we anchored in what was called "Iron Bottom Bay". It was right off the island of Tulagi, that's opposite Guadalcanal. They called it Iron Bottom Bay because so many ships had been sunk there. They think that there were more ships sunk in the slot and off of Tulagi then in any other one place in all the Pacific. That was in the earlier days of the Solomons campaign. We just anchored there and we went ashore and we climb a big long mountainside and we found a little officer's club, which was just an improvised thing with a lot of bamboo, {garbled} and that sort of thing. It was organized by a bunch of enterprising Marines privately. And they printed up some little tickets…Books of tickets and you had to pay, I think it was $12 for a book of tickets and each drink was 40 cents. So if you were only there overnight, or for a day you could only use about $1.60 of tickets so they pocketed the remainder.

JN: {LG}

AK: And I always figured there were several very rich Marines after the war…{LG}…The owners of the Officer's Club at Port Tulagi.

JN: That was at Tulagi then?

AK: Yes up on the mountainside. Well then we sailed farther down the slot and out into the Coral Sea and I don't know what we were supposed to be looking for frankly because the action was pretty far north of there at that time, but anyway we were in the Coral Sea and we circled around north of Australia and we headed back up north to the Admiralty Islands and we went ashore. They put us ashore for a while, a matter of days, on Pityilu and Ponam. How do you like those names? Then they put us back aboard ship and sailed us west along the north coast of New Guinea, which had been pretty well neutralized. We went out to Biak and I think we went ashore at Biak and that's out near Hollondia. And then we got back onto the ship and we went in to give support to General MacArthur's landings on Morotai. And you know Nimitz gave MacArthur the Seventh Fleet under Admiral Kincaid and we were Kincaid's flagship. And so there were a lot of other ships involved but we had the admiral aboard. And we gave air support to MacArthur as he himself walked ashore at Morotai and that's the time I got fired at by my own ships.

JN: Oh yea tell us about that.

AK: Well we were out there to protect the invaders against early morning raids who came over from the Celebes and the Moluccas, this was the Dutch East Indies and the Japanese still controlled them. And they sent early morning flights over to disrupt our landings and we were supposed to disrupt the disrupters. Well I was up there with a small flight of TBMs and I think we were at about ten-thousand feet on guard against zeros. All of a sudden my radioman said he was seeing puffs of smoke right below us. And I thought, "That's kind of funny, the Japanese are not firing at us". Our ships were firing at us.

JN: Wow.

AK: Because these gunners, ya know woke up early in the morning and they saw some planes up there and thought, "We better fire at them". So they did and I realized what was going on and I gave orders to, as we used to say "get the hell out of there" and we came back to the ship. And Captain Johnson[12] called out to his opposite number on the beach in the Army and said he didn't know whether to be "mad as hell" at them for shooting at us or "scared as hell" that they couldn't hit us.

JN: {LG}

AK: End of story…{LG}…Then we continued to give air support and to try to neutralize the airfields on Halmahera, which was the big island to the south and that's when we had the big rescue mission for Lt. Johnson[13].

[12] Captain Douglass P. Johnson
[13] Ens. Harold A. Thompson, USNR. Fighter Squadron 26. Rescued from Wasile Bay

JN: Please describe that. I know that's in your book, but…

AK: Well that's been written up; as a matter of fact there's a lot of…The PT boat commander[14] received the Medal of Honor for his mission. It's been written up *in extenso* but I can give you just a brief outline on it.

JN: Sure you're perspective, or what you remember of it.

AK: Now several others…J.P. Fox, who just died Captain Fox and Deloach Cope, were flying air cover and they were on this mission for I think three or four hours I was only on it for about two hours and I was dropping bombs along the shore to try to keep the Japanese from coming out to get one of our pilots. He was not from our ship, but from a neighbor ship[15], who had been shot down and was anchored out, or he wasn't anchored he was floating in his life raft out off shore. And I won't go into all the details but we sent in a PBY to try to rescue him but he was driven off by fire from the beach and finally a PT boat came over from New Guinea and made a very narrow dash through the neck from Galela Bay into Wasile Bay and stopped dead in the water and picked up this pilot, a man named Johnson, and made a dash out and succeeded in getting out although he was being fired on from the beach by the Japanese all the way along. And it was very heroic and very skillful mission and I didn't know who it was. Naturally I was up at eight or ten-thousand feet, but I remember having great admiration for whoever it was and thinking, "That fella deserves some kind of special praise". Well, back in Washington after the war and for many years thereafter I knew a man named Murray Preston, who was the Vice-President of the American Security and Trust Company and I knew that he had won the Congressional Medal of Honor in the Navy, and that was the end of my knowledge, he was very modest and never talked about it. And after he died, in his obituary, I read that he had been the pilot of that PT boat that went into Wasile Bay, picked up the pilot and brought him out safely; a fellow for whom I had flown air cover without even knowing who it was. And he wouldn't talk about it and I didn't know about it, and that's when I said jokingly, "Everyone should write their own obituary before he died".

JN: No that is fascinating because you hear stories like that where; you know it's not something that they talk about or they don't blow their own trumpet or whatever. Then you find out.

AK: Well I know his family and I know his daughters and I know his grandchildren and they are friends of my sons and we had dinner together about two months ago and they were delighted to know that I had been involved in this. I was delighted to

[14] Lt. Arthur Murray Preston, USNR. Commander PT Squadron 33
[15] *USS Santee (CVE-29)*

know that…I'm a fox hunter in my spare time, or I used to be, and we used to hunt over a farm here in Maryland that was owned by Murray Preston. And we had so many criss-crossing…Things that we didn't know about until it was too late.

JN: Small world.

AK: Yes it is.

JN: Couple more questions. Can you talk about…? You talked about in our pre-interview, about the volcanoes and flying…

AK: Oh yes!

JN: Talk about that.

AK: Well they were just fun. Haleakala, I think was one of them on Maui. There is another one but I can't remember the name. And you know they were bubbling, they had this hot molten lava and every once and a while the ones in Hawaii erupt and they pour this stuff over the side and it goes into the water and makes a big plum and steam and all that sort of thing. Well we weren't supposed to fly down into them, into these…Oh what do you call it?

JN: Crater?

AK: Crater yes. But these craters are filled with molten lava and they're bubbling. It's like a pot on the stove and we could fly down and fly as close as you could, and of course we were trained in that, and we would be maybe forty-five or fifty feet off the surface of the lava and it would push us up. It kind of push, push, push, push and it would be like flying in little fluffy clouds. It was pretty reliable and I think it was safe because those things give a little warning before they erupt and we didn't see any warnings so it was lots of fun.

JN: {LG}…You said it would be like you would just be bouncing up on the updraft?

AK: Yes. Well the heat coming off of that molten lava would create a little updraft and it would kind of catch you and buoy you, kind of like playing on a…A couch or something with a lot of soft furry fluff. It was a lot of fun.

JN: And obviously no injury or incidents.

AK: No, no. No untoward incidents.

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}…From higher authority or from the natural forces, neither one.

JN: Last thing I wanted to ask you about, because I found this to be pretty insightful or very interesting. Can you describe where you were and what your feelings were when you found out the war had ended.

AK: Well yes I can remember that rather vividly for some reason. I was then acting skipper for VT-23 and we were based in Pasco, Washington, which is east of Seattle, and I had taken a flight over to Seattle for some reason on August the…What was it fourteenth?

JN: Yeah.

AK: August fourteenth and I was on the way home and I had a wingman and we were over the Cascade Mountains, I remember it rather vividly and he started waving his arms and looking as though he was going crazy and I didn't know what he was doing, and then he began shaking his wings and I couldn't figure out what he was talking about and he kept pointing to his earphones. Well then I figured he was trying to send me a message and so I tuned into the local station, a news station I thought and I got the news that Japan had surrendered. So we flew on home to Pasco and landed and the squadron guys got together and decided that we ought to have a picnic to celebrate somehow or other and by this time some of our officers were married, I was married at that point and others had girlfriends and it was a very substantial group of guys and gals. So we went down on the banks of the Snake River where it flows into the Columbia, there is a junction there east of Portland and we had a picnic and you would think that it would be a very hilarious and happy and joyous affair but you know it was very somber. The thing was that here we were prepared for an attack on the Japanese mainland, that was what we were being prepared for and all of a sudden it was kind of like pulling the rug out from under you. We didn't know what we were going to do and most of these men had come directly into naval service out of school and I had been out in private life and I had been a newspaper reporter and an editor, I was an old geezer by that time, twenty-seven years old and so I kind of knew what I was going to do, I was going back into editing and reporting and writing but these other guys didn't have the faintest idea what they were going to do and it was very somber. And we sat around and we talked around the campfire and we drank and we…We…I don't say commiserated with each other, but we were kind of philosophizing.

JN: That's interesting.

AK: The only people who were happy were the women.

JN: {LG}

AK: {LG}…They were having a fine time. They thought, "This is grand". This is what they had been waiting for the whole time.

JN: That is a very interesting perspective that I have to say that I had never heard before. I guess you have been doing this for so long and it's kind of become part of your life and now it's over.

AK: It was very unusual. I don't know whether anybody else had that same experience because you remember there was a famous picture of the Sailor in…

JN: Time Square.

AK: Time Square! Kissing the girl and everybody was joyous and they were shouting and screaming and shooting off pistols and all that kind of business. But for those of us who were getting ready for combat it was…At least for us it was different.

JN: Yeah.

AK: We just felt as though we were a little bit bewildered. "Now what are we going to do?"

JN: Now as a closing question; How did, and I know that this is a very broad question, but how did your wartime experience help you later in life or what kind of effect did your wartime experience have on you later?

AK: Well you know I'm going to kind of be a disappointment to you on that one because for a great many people and a lot of my friends wartime experience was a transforming experience. Ben Bradley, who was Editor-in-Chief of the Washington Post, credits his naval experience for having set his course in life and Ben was no soft hearted, starry-eyed young idealist. He was a hard driven, hard bitten newspaperman but his naval experience was central to making him into what he subsequently became. I had pretty well set my course and was already on it and I felt that the war was kind of a detour. And it didn't change my basic outlook. You know I'd been writing about international affairs and I'd been writing the rise of Hitler and in fact I thought we were far behind schedule in joining in, I thought we should have been in the war from the beginning. I was an internationalist, I was not an isolationist; the country was, the country was isolationist up until December sixth, it took Pearl Harbor to swing it violently in the opposite direction but I had felt from the beginning that we belonged in this war and that Hitler was an unbelievable scourge on the earth and ought to have been destroyed a lot sooner. So you see I already had my mind set and my thought patterns and all that sort of thing…I'd been through graduate school and I'd done some writing and I'd done some editing and so it didn't really shift my compass, it was just something that had to be done. You

know, I didn't get married before the war because I felt very clearly that we were going to be in it and I didn't want to start a family, then possibly go off and not come back and leave somebody with…Alone. And that's why I refrained from getting married for several years before the war because I just didn't want to start anything, I knew this war was coming and we were going to be in it.

JN: So how early did you believe that?...If you could put a year on it or an event?

AK: Well I tell you, way back in 1938 when the Anschluss and Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia; he called it the…Oh what did he call it?

JN: Yeah I know what you're talking about…I can't…

AK: Then there was the Anschluss with Austria and then Chamberlain, Neville Chamberlain declared "Peace in our time" and everybody had a one year gap when Hitler refrained from doing any dangerous things. Sudetenland! He took over Czechoslovakia and called it the Sudetenland of Germany. I was in college and these were days, I don't want to go into this it's too involved, but you had the communists who were anti-Hitler and then Stalin and Hitler signed the non-aggression pact and young communists in America shifted; they became isolationists. "Oh we shouldn't get into this". Well that was when we knew who were communists and who weren't because they were following the party line. And I was an independent individualist and an internationalist and I thought that we should have been in the war a lot sooner than we were. So you see what I'm saying?

JN: I do, I do.

AK: My thought pattern had already been formed I was not just right out of college. I was out of college and graduate school and reporting in San Francisco and editing in Washington.

JN: So you were already very well versed in the international situation, and so in many ways you were involved in the war in ways that other people weren't because you had been…

AK: Exactly. That's well put. You know I did not finish my degree work at Harvard in economics because I knew the war was going to hit us and I didn't know when or how, but I knew that we had to be in it and I did not want to go straight out of graduate school into the navy. So I wanted to get out and get started in my profession and I did I got two years of experience that I would not have had otherwise.

JN: What were your thoughts about the…We are kind of going back to the beginning, but I think this is very good. What were your thoughts about the Japanese Empire and, did you...?

AK: Well I had friends who were Japanese and I didn't view this as a personal thing. The Japanese militarists…You had two factions in Japan; you had the Prince Konoye group who were the liberals and they were relatively internationally minded, but they were shoved aside by the militarists. The militarists were sort of the Hitler type; they were traditionalists, the Zaibatsu, they followed the old Japanese philosophy "Japan forever", and as a matter of fact when we dropped the atomic bomb those militarists were ready to fight on until the last Japanese died on the beaches. They were fanatic, and they were living in an old fashioned philosophy that was probably four-hundred years old and went way back into Japanese history, and Japan was spilt. I had a close personal friend at Harvard named Honjo, Fumihiko Honjo and he was a member of the more liberal group, you know the internationally minded group, and when Pearl Harbor came he was interned because he was a semi-diplomatic service and I wrote to him and expressed my dismay and regret and hopes that we would sometimes meet again and so on, and so on, and so on. He could never reply because he was under arrest. He was repatriated to Japan; he became the head of the American Division of the Foreign Office and subsequently came back to the United States as the Japanese Ambassador.

JN: Wow.

AK: And I was entertaining a group down at the Kennedy Center, I was president of the symphony at that time, and my wife turned to me and said "the Ambassador says he knew you at Harvard", and I said "no this is Ambassador Togo". He had married and taken his wife's family name, so I didn't recognize Togo because I had known Honjo. I turned and looked and there he was, my friend from…Let me see this was 1950s, this was 1960s so this was twenty-five years earlier. Here he was my old friend, and I hadn't seen him since. And in the interim he had married and had two sons and I had married and had two sons and now my sons know each other. Isn't that something?

JN: That is wonderful; again small world.

AK: Yeah, yeah so I think my attitude was that, you know you had two Japans and we were fighting the military and there were a lot of fine Japanese people but they were not in control and we hoped that someday they would be and for God's sake someday they were.

JN: Did you see Japan as a threat?

AK: Well sure they wanted to destroy us. I didn't think they could ever do it, but there was no question that they were out to destroy us. They had occupied and militarized all of those islands; you know that was in direct violation of the League of Nations. The League of Nations had forbidden any kind of militarization in the Pacific and the Japanese just brushed that aside. All of those islands that we were attacking; the Marshall Islands; the Marianas;…

JN: The Gilbert Islands.

AK: The Gilberts; all of those were done in opposition to the League of Nations which was virtually powerless by that time.

JN: Now you said the country was isolationist. Do you feel?...because I had understood that the country was beginning to change and the spread I heard was fifty-fifty.

AK: Well it was changing but Roosevelt would have liked to put us in the war a lot sooner, I think he was a realist. But he couldn't bring the congress around. Now all of the movements are ahead of their spoken positions. The spoken positions are hardened and the changes are taking place underneath. Yes I think that person to person, if you could have had a private poll you would have found that they were much more interventionist then the public position. But publicly our position was isolationist and it took a jolt to change it.

END OF INTERVIEW

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